NATION

LeT 'plotting' IED blasts near Red Fort, Chandni Chowk

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Firms using 'AI washing' to mask global lay-offs: Altman

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Super 8: Tilak and Surya face their first real test vs SA

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 22 FEBRUARY 2026 | SUNDAY | BENGALURU | 4 RAMADAN, 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 46 | Pages: 8

India 'studying' US SC's ruling on tariffs

Don says nothing's changed, India will pay levy

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The Indian government is closely monitoring developments on US tariffs and their implications, following a Supreme Court ruling that struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping import duties. Trump, however, immediately announced a temporary 10 per cent levy on all imports for 150 days, effective 24 February, insisting the India-US trade deal remains "unchanged."

Trump emphasised at a press conference that the framework for the interim trade agreement with India is intact. "Nothing changes. They'll be paying tariffs, and we will not be paying tariffs. The India deal is on…all the deals are on, we're just going to do it in a different way," he said.

The proclamation, titled Imposing a Temporary Import Surcharge to Address Fundamental International Payments Problems, imposes a

10 per cent ad valorem duty on imported goods, in addition to existing duties. Certain items, including critical minerals, energy products, agricultural produce, pharmaceuticals, electronics, passenger vehicles, buses, and aerospace components, are exempt to meet US economic needs.

The US-India interim agreement, announced earlier this month, had reduced reciprocal tariffs from 25 per cent to 18 per cent and removed the 25 per cent punitive levy on Indian oil imports from Russia. The new 10 per cent levy now applies to Indian goods.

Trump repeatedly claimed that tariffs had helped resolve conflicts, including stopping a potential war between India and Pakistan last summer. "I also stopped the war between India and Pakistan…largely with tariffs," he said, adding that the Prime Minister of Pakistan had acknowledged that his actions saved millions of lives. The Supreme Court's 6-3 verdict, authored by Chief Justice John Roberts, declared Trump's global tariffs illegal, stating the president had exceeded his authority. The ruling came as a setback to Trump's economic agenda, but he lashed out at the justices, calling them "fools and lapdogs." —*PTI*

>>>More on Pgs 3, 5 , 6 & 7

India, Brazil ink pact on rare minerals, set $20B trade target

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

India and Brazil set an annual bilateral trade target of USD 20 billion in the next five years and signed a pact for cooperation in critical minerals after talks between Prime Minister Modi and Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Saturday.

The two leaders also vowed to shore up ties in other areas like defence, energy, healthcare and digital public infrastructure, emphasising a deeper India-Brazil strategic engagement.

Modi said India and Brazil are unanimous that terrorism and its supporters are "enemies" of humanity and noted that both sides agreed that reform of global institutions is essential to address challenges facing the world. President Lula is in India on a five-day visit from 18 February, primarily to attend the India AI Impact Summit and hold talks with Modi.

In 2024-25, the India-Brazil trade volume reached USD 12 billion, with Indian exports amounting to USD 6.77 billion and imports from Brazil totalling USD 5.43 billion.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva with Prime Minister Narendra Modi with in New Delhi's Hyderabad House on Saturday —*PTI*

The PM said the agreement on critical minerals is a major step towards building resilient supply chains. Besides the pact on critical minerals, India and Brazil also firmed up a joint declaration on digital partnership and signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in mining, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), healthcare and traditional knowledge systems.

Modi said that the voice of the Global South becomes stronger when India and Brazil work together.

ADANI, EMBRAER TO SET UP FINAL ASSEMBLY LINE FOR E175 JETS

Adani Defence & Aerospace and Brazilian major Embraer plan to set up a final assembly line in India for the E175 regional jets. Both companies' officials exchanged an MoU in the presence of Lula. This follows the two companies announcing a strategic collaboration on 27 January. The E175 plane can seat up to 88 people and can be deployed for connecting Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. —*PTI*

US, UK, China back Delhi Declaration on AI

NEW DELHI, 21 NEW DELHI

Eighty-eight countries and international organisations, including the United States, United Kingdom, China and France, have endorsed the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact, adopted at the AI Impact Summit 2026 held on 18–19 February. The declaration, guided by the principle "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" (Welfare for all, Happiness for all), stresses that AI benefits must be shared equitably. It calls for stronger international cooperation, respect for national sovereignty and the development of secure, trustworthy and accessible AI frameworks. Built around seven pillars, it focuses on democratising AI resources, driving economic growth and social good, advancing AI for science, promoting social empowerment, developing human capital, and ensuring resilient AI.—*PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

Judicial offices leave cancelled in WB for SIR duty

KOLKATA, 21 FEB

The Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, Sujoy Paul, has cancelled the leave of all judicial officers across West Bengal until 9 March to ensure compliance with directions from the Supreme Court of India regarding the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. A notification issued by the Registrar General stated that all previously sanctioned leave, except on medical grounds, stands withdrawn. Officers currently on leave must resume duties by 23 February. Judicial officers under transfer orders have been directed to join their new postings by 24 February without availing transit leave. The decision follows an "extraordinary" directive from the apex court amid a dispute between the state government and the Election Commission of India.—*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

60 arrested in MP's Jabalpur after communal clashes

JABALPUR, 21 FEB

Sihora in Jabalpur district remained peaceful on Saturday after two days of communal tension, with around 500 police personnel, some in anti-riot gear, deployed across the town. Sixty persons have been arrested in connection with Thursday night's stone-pelting and vandalism, Inspector General of Police Pramod Verma said. Security was strengthened in sensitive areas of Jabalpur and neighbouring Katni and Seoni districts. Violence erupted near Azad Chowk, where a Durga temple and mosque stand close. Trouble began during 'aarti' and Ramzan prayers. "The town remains peaceful. Things are fully under control. Sixty people have been arrested so far," Verma said Markets reopened, said Dr Sanjeev Shrivastava.—*PTI*

Cong's AI summit protest was similar to Nepal Gen-Z stir: Cops

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Delhi police have told a court that the Indian Youth Congress workers who were arrested during their shirtless protest at the India AI Impact Summit on Friday bore similarities to the Gen-Z protests in Nepal, and alleged it was part of a conspiracy to give a bad name to India globally.

Judicial Magistrate Ravi allowed the Delhi Police's plea seeking five days of custodial interrogation of the accused persons.

The arrested protesters were Krishna Hari, national secretary of Youth Congress from Bihar; Kundan Yadav, IYC state secretary, Bihar; Ajay Kumar, IYC state president, Uttar Pradesh; and Narasimha Yadav from Telangana.

Delhi Police sought five-day custody of the arrested protesters, arguing that they raised anti-national slogans and wore T-shirts with objectionable images of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the event venue. It said the mobile phones of the accused persons were required to be recovered and, as they were from different states, custodial interrogation was necessary. Counsel for the police argued that it was a "serious" matter. An attempt was made to stop the police, following which three personnel were injured, he said. Besides, the conspiracy behind organising the protest, the source of funding and where the T-shirts were printed needed to be ascertained, the counsel said. The counsel appearing for the protesters argued that they were associated with a political party and had exercised right to protest. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pg 3,

Clashes in Kalaburagi during Shivaji Jayanthi

KALABURAGI, 21 FEB

About three people have suffered injuries in a clash between two communities inside the Wadi police station area of Kalaburgi district here during the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanthi celebrations.

The incident in which the two communities fought with sticks and pelted stones at each other took place in Ravoor village of Chittapur taluk, under the jurisdiction of the Wadi Police Station.

The latest communal clashes came close on the heels of a similar incident in the Bagalkot district. It took place when a particular community in the village allegedly objected to the loud noise on the sound system during a dance programme at the Shivaji festival, sources said.

Members of another community allegedly objected to the loud noise of the music and asked the organisers to reduce the volume. This led to an argument between the two communities, eventually turning into a physical altercation,

The incident allegedly took place when a particular community in the village allegedly objected to the loud noise on the sound system during a dance programme at the Shivaji festival —*SALAR*

with both sides allegedly using sticks and stones. Minor injuries were reported on both sides.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Elders and local leaders intervened and facilitated a compromise between the two communities. Sources said both sides agreed not to file any formal complaints.

The situation in the village continues to be tense but under control. The police said they are closely monitoring the situation. Residents were apprehensive that festival celebrations could quickly escalate into larger conflicts. They called for vigilance from both the communities and authorities to maintain peace in the area. —*Salar News*

AFTER COURT ORDER

Shankaracharya to face FIR over 'sexual abuse' of boys

PRAYAGRAJ, 21 FEB

A POCSO court here on Saturday ordered the Jhunsi Police Station SHO to register an FIR against Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati and investigate allegations of sexual abuse of boys.

Last week, Special Judge (POCSO Act) Vinod Kumar Chaurasia reserved decision on an application filed by Ashutosh Brahmachari Maharaj under Section 173(4) of BNS after examining the evidence and recording the statements of the victimised 'batooks', the boys, as they are called at the ashram, Vidya Math.

The petitioner had filed the application seeking a direction for an FIR against Avimukteshwaranand under Sections 69, 74, 75, 76, 79 and 109 (sexual assault) of the BNS, as well as Sections 3/5/9 and 17 of POCSO.

The court ordered the police to conduct an investigation.

"Starting today, we are organising a Sanatan Yatra from here to Vidya Math. We will demonstrate how children are sexually abused at Vidya Math. We presented evidence to the court and will also provide it to the police," Ashutosh Brahmachari said.

Swami Avimukteshwarananda has been in the headlines for his confrontation with the organisers of the Magh Mela in Prayagraj —*PTI*

This comes amid his open rift with the BJP. The Shankaracharyas, including Avimukteshwaranand and the Shankaracharya of Puri, criticized the January 2024 consecration of the Ayodhya Ram temple, stating that it violated scriptures.

He questioned how a political figure like Modi can inaugurate a temple. He accused Modi of sidelining the Shankaracharya.

Avimukteshwarananda has been in the headlines for his confrontation with the organisers of the Magh Mela in Prayagraj. He accused the administration of preventing him from bathing on Mauni Amavasya. — *PTI*

MADE IN INDIA CHIPS CRUCIAL FOR DEVELOPED NATION: PM

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the foundation of a developed India would rest on self-reliance, stressing that having chips made in India is very important.

Addressing virtually the foundation stone laying of India Chip Pvt Ltd — a joint venture between HCL Group and Foxconn — he said weak chip supply chains during the Covid-19 pandemic halted development in several economies and stopped factories.

"Developed India will be built only when India is self-reliant. For this, Made in India chip is very important. Whatever India is doing in the field of technology in this decade, it will become the foundation of our capability in the 21st century," Modi said.

The OSAT facility will come up at Jewar in Greater Noida and is expected to be operational by 2028 with an investment of Rs 3,700 crore.

"In the last 11 years, the Prime Minister has established India as a powerhouse of electronics manufacturing. India is now ranked third among nations that export electronics. In a month, 3.6 crore chips will be produced from this plant. The brains of the digital screens that you see will now be made in Jewar," said Ashwini Vaishnaw. — *PTI*

DOCUMENTARY HONOURS SECULAR VISIONARY K RAHMAN KHAN

A new Urdu documentary on Dr K Rahman Khan journals his unwavering commitment to education, social upliftment, and inclusive development.

Titled 'A Guiding Light for the Community', the documentary traces Dr Khan's contributions as a visionary leader who worked for empowerment and institutional growth. His tenure in public life reflects a combination of integrity, foresight, and humility. The film emphasizes how his leadership extended beyond politics, focusing instead on strengthening communities, promoting harmony, and nurturing young minds.

Eminent personalities reflect on his impact. Former vice president Hamid Ansari speaks of his intellectual clarity and balanced approach to public service. Veteran statesman Yashwant Sinha acknowledges his steadfast principles and dedication to democratic values. Former Rajya Sabha MP Adeeb highlights his administrative vision and community-oriented initiatives. Former chief minister M Veerappa Moily reflects on his inclusive outlook, while former minister Roshan Baig and Salar Publications Trustee Sadaqat Peeran recall his accessibility and personal warmth.

Adding a lyrical dimension to the film is a soulful ghazal rendered by Raghu Pati Jhai.

The documentary by Sabiha Zubair Khan stands as a historical record of a compassionate leader respected across political lines and ideologies.

Scan the QR code below to watch the documentary, streaming on Salar Urdu Digital Youtube from 15 February.

Four killed as tractor falls into ditch in Bagalkot

BAGALKOT, 21 FEB

Four people, including a two-year-old child, lost their lives when a tractor fell into a ditch in Bagalkot district during the early hours of Saturday. The accident occurred at around 2 am near Katte Kere in Jamkhandi taluk, when a trailer detached from the tractor returning after sugarcane harvesting. The deceased are identified as Manish Pande, 23, two-year-old Halaki Pande, Lakshmi Chirmadi, 27, and Rekha Bhuke, all residents of Gupwadi in Busa taluk, Maharashtra. The victims were migrant labourers, with about 20 people travelling in the tractor. Jamkhandi police rushed to the scene, conducted the inspection and shifted the bodies for post-mortem. A case has been registered, and further investigation is ongoing—*PTI*

Honour killings, child marriage still an issue: CM aide

KOLAR, 21 FEB

Despite progress in various fields and conquering the moon, societal issues like child marriage and honour killings still persist, lamented KV Prabhakar, Media Advisor to the Chief Minister at Bangarpet in Kolar. Speaking at a function organised by Manvanthara Prakashana in Bangarpet to honour achievers, he emphasised education's role in creating a just society, urging the community to ensure good education for their children. He stressed that honour killings must be eliminated and NGOs can play a vital role in raising awareness. Anantharam, President of Manvanthara Prakashana, highlighted that his NGO has honoured many social workers, encouraging the public to support those working for societal progress without seeking publicity. Ramesh, a renowned Pani Puri vendor, was among those honoured for his international recognition. —*Salar News*

One more held in Snehamayi-MUDA case

Cops say accused acted on a personal vendetta against ex MUDA head over financial tiff

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

In a key development in a cyber defamation case involving social activist Snehamayi Krishna, police on Saturday arrested a man for allegedly circulating fake documents and a fabricated audio clip targeting senior KAS officer and former MUDA commissioner DB Natesh.

Police said the accused, N Vinod, acted out of "hostility arising from certain transactions" between him and the complainant.

"During the investigation, it was found that due to hostility arising from certain transactions between Vinod and the complainant. Vinod, with the intention of taking revenge for personal gain, contacted Krishna and provided false information," police said in a statement.

"Krishan, without verifying the authenticity of the information received, circulated it on social media with malicious intent to defame and damage the complainant's reputation," the release said.

Ex MUDA commissioner DB Natesh; Activist Snehamayi Krishna —*PTI*

The case was registered on 18 February at the Bengaluru City Cyber Crime Police Station based on a complaint filed by Natesh, former Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) Commissioner, police said.

In his complaint, Natesh alleged that Krishna, a resident of Mysuru, had been targeting and harassing him by creating fake documents, morphed photographs and a fabricated audio clip, and uploading them on Facebook with the intention of defaming him. Krishna had been levelling allegations of corruption against Karnataka Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and Natesh.

Police arrested Krishna on Friday. A notice was then issued to Vinod, a resident of Bogadi in Mysuru, directing him to appear before the police. He was then arrested after investigation.

Additionally, another case has been registered against Krishna at the Vidhana Soudha Police Station for allegedly spreading false information and carrying out defamatory propaganda.

Krishna was the complainant in the MUDA land allotment case, based on which a case was registered against CM Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi BM, her brother Mallikarjuna Swamy and others. —*PTI*

Govt arrested Krishna to silence him: BJP

MYSURU, 21 FEB

The Mysuru district unit of the BJP said that the government arrested RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna to "silence his voice".

District BJP Spokesperson Mohan condemned the arrest and called for the suspension of Chief Secretary Shalini Rajaneesh and KAS officer DB Natesh, a former commissioner of MUDA over corruption charges.

Mohan condemned the police for arresting a whistleblower without issuing any notice to him and conducting an inquiry against the allegations levelled by Krishna.

Police violated the rules while conducting the Mahajar of the house of Krishna, he said. They took all the documents Krishna had at his home.

"This indicates that the State government has attempted to destroy the evidence using police force," Mohan said.

Mohan urged the State government to immediately release Krishna and initiate action against the police officials responsible for the whistleblower's arrest.

Krishna was a key activist in the MUDA scam case involving Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi BM, her brother Mallikarjuna Swamy and others. —*Salar News*

Woman's nude, headless body found in U Kannada

UTTARA KANNADA, 21 FEB

In a shocking, fearful stunning incident, the headless nude body of an unidentified woman was discovered in a forested area near Kolagi village in Mundgod taluk in Uttara Kannada district on Friday evening, sending shockwaves across the region.

Uttara Kannada superintendent of police Deepan NL said the victim is believed to be between 33 and 35 years old. Police suspect that the murderers may have beheaded the woman to conceal her identity and later disposed of the body in the forest.

The gruesome discovery was made by a local woman who had gone into the forest to collect firewood. Upon noticing the body, she rushed back to the village and informed others.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the murder may have taken place elsewhere, with the body dumped at the forest site. The crime is believed to have occurred at least two days prior. The body had reportedly been covered with tree branches and leaves, possibly in an attempt to hide it, SP Deepan added. sPolice from Mundgod rushed to the scene upon receiving information and began an investigation. A search operation is underway in the surrounding forest area to locate the missing head. —*Salar News*

Gadag BJP MLA caught by Lokayukta accepting Rs 5L bribe

GADAG, 21 FEB

Lokayukta police on Saturday said they caught BJP MLA Chandru Lamani and his two aides allegedly accepting a Rs 5 lakh bribe.

The trap was laid by the Gadag Lokayukta police based on a complaint by a contractor.

Lokayukta officials said the alleged bribe demand was linked to works under the Minor Irrigation Department, including the construction of retaining walls along a road.

This involved a public works contract involving the construction of a roadside retaining wall in Sankadal village, estimated at around Rs 1 crore. The accused allegedly

- Shirahatti MLA Lamani demanded the bribe from a contractor, who then filed a complaint. Lamani demanded a Rs 11 lakh bribe to issue the contract for public development work

demanded a bribe of Rs 11 lakh from contractor Vijay Poojar.

Unable to meet the demand, the complainant approached the Lokayukta police. Officials registered a case under the Prevention of Corruption Act and laid a trap. The accused were reportedly caught red-handed while accepting Rs 5 lakh as part of an instalment.

Along with the MLA, who represents the Shirahatti Assembly constituency, his personal assistants — Manjunath Valmiki and Guru Naik — have also been secured. —*Salar News*

Child protection dept saves girl from marriage

SIDLAGATTA, 21 FEB

The child protection department saved a minor girl from getting married to a 30 year old man. The authorities also got an injunction from the court to prevent any attempt by the girl's parents to marry off the girl before 18.

The incident took place in Sidlagatta taluk when the Child Helpline received a call on 10 February about parents attempting to get their minor daughter married.

Soon, District Child Protection Officer Nautaj rushed to the spot and found that an engagement function was on for the 16-year-old girl.

Nautaj convinced the parents against marriage and also advised the groom. The girl was later left with the Balikiyara Bala Mandira in Chikkaballapura.

Fearing that the girl's parents may go ahead with the marriage once the girl comes out of the Bala Mandira, the Child Protection Officer filed a suit and sought an injunction restraining the girl's parents from conducting the wedding.

The Senior Civil Judge and JMFC, Sidlagatta, issued injunction orders on Thursday.

—*Salar News*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao and others during 'Abhaya Hastha' organised by the Health and Family Welfare Department, in Bengaluru on Saturday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Industrialisation gave nothing: Kolar MLA

KOLAR, 21 FEB

Angered that he and other local representatives were not invited to the inauguration of TATA Airbus Helicopters manufacturing facility in Vemagal of the district on Tuesday, Manjunath said that private companies were ill-treating local farmers by not providing adequate job opportunities or land compensation.

He claimed on Thursday that the companies, which had promised to provide jobs for the locals whose land they had acquired, terminated the employees quickly and instead preferred to hire people from neighbouring states.

He added that when jobs were given to the local population, they were low paying while the high-paying jobs were given to people from outside.

He said the power supply in and around Vemagal, where huge industries have come up will be affected as the BESCOM authorities are not erecting separate transformer to supply power to these companies. Hence, power supply to farm lands would be hit.

He courted controversy by saying that power should be cut to the Vemagal area, claiming that he was fighting for farmers and not because he was snubbed from the event inaugurated by the Union Defence Minister. He said that tractors could be driven into transformers to disrupt the electricity lines. —*Salar News*

'Form expert committee to study guarantee schemes'

MYSURU, 21 FEB

BJP MLC AH Vishwanath on Saturday said the State government should constitute and experts committee to study the five guarantee schemes, after the Supreme Court's criticised freebies.

Speaking to press in Mysuru, he claimed that the apex court took strong objection various states, including Karnataka, for implementing guarantee schemes without any yardstick.

He said that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had been giving extending guarantee benefits to both deserving and undeserving people for the sake of vote bank politics. He added that the guarantee schemes had bankrupted the State, as the debt burden increased from to Rs 7.5 lakh crores from Rs 2.5 lakh under the Siddaramaiah government.

Vishwanath claimed that a large amount of the State's finances were being poured into the guarantee schemes. Hence, the State government should constitute an expert committee to study the schemes and assess whether they brought any development. —*Salar News*

Govt is curbing corruption: CM as he appoints 1,000 health officials

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

Asserting that curbing corruption in appointments and transfers is his government's clear objective, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday handed over 1,000 appointment letters for the Health and Family Welfare Department.

He said that all recruitments and transfers in the Health Department are being carried out strictly through counselling to ensure transparency.

"All these recruitments are being done through counselling. The government's objective is to eliminate corruption," he said, speaking at 'Abhaya Hasta' organised by the Department of Health and Family Welfare. He said that counselling would also streamline transfer, saying that 5,700 doctors were transferred through the programme.

"These new appointments have also been made through counselling so that corruption does not take place in transfers and recruitments," he said.

Referring to vacant posts, he said the government had assured people after returning to power that vacancies would be filled in a phased manner.More than 2.5 lakh posts are vacant. These will be filled in stages, he said, adding that special focus was being given to Education, Health and Police departments, which he described as essential services. —*PTI*

Youth Cong protest may not have been right: Priyank

BENGALURU, 21 FEB

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge, on Saturday said the manner of protest by the Indian Youth Congress at the India AI Impact Summit may not have been in the "right spirit".

Reacting to the shirtless protests, Priyank said, "Whatever happened, I'm not sure if that was in the right spirit. But if the Government of India or the BJP is so embarrassed, then they should have felt embarrassed when a university (Galgotias University) and a few other companies projected Chinese products (robotic dog) as their own."

He also asked why the PM was given more importance than tech leaders.

Meanwhile, JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy took a dig on X: "One must admire the Congress' impeccable timing. Just as India was showcasing its technological ascendancy to the world, it chose to showcase disruption." —*ANI*

BJP leaders detained at Freedom Park on Saturday for protesting against Congress' 'shirtless stir' —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

2 NEW DOGS INDUCTED

Vijayapura police honour retiring canines

VIJAYAPURA, 21 FEB

Karnataka's Vijayapura District Police organised a ceremony on Saturday to mark the retirement of two veteran police dogs— Raksha and Stella. Superintendent of Police Lakshman Nimbargi presided over the event honouring the police dogs' 12 years of service in crime detection and security.

Superintendent Nimbargi stated that Stella played a vital role in over 600 criminal cases, helping the department identify more than 30 accused individuals. Noting that her contribution to crime detection is highly valued by the force. Meanwhile, Raksha, who specialises in detecting explosives and contraband, has also been a prominent fixture in security operations.

Vijayapura police organised a cermony to honour dogs Raksha and Stella, who were retired from service —*PTI*

The retirement of both these dogs was an emotional moment for the department, with the police officials remembering their service.

Meanwhile, two new police dogs, Yoddha and Veda, were officially inducted into the service. Yoddha, a Belgian Malinois breed, specialises in crime detection, while Veda is trained in detecting bombs and explosives. Nimbargi expressed confidence that the new dogs will further strengthen the department's performance.

In total over 150 Indian dog breeds have been deployed across multiple operations, including the Western and Eastern borders and anti-Naxalite zones. The statement noted that their performance has validated the decision to integrate indigenous breeds into critical security and operational roles. —*ANI*

State's mounted police bag silver, bronze medals

MYSURU, 21 FEB

The Karnataka Armed Reserve Police's Company's Assistant Head Constable, Suresh Malali, brought laurels to the force by winning a silver and bronze medal at the All India Mounted Police Championship and the All India Mounted Police Sports meet held at the BSF Academy in Gwalior on 16 February.

Mounted police units from 15 states participated in show jumping Grade 3 and Bar Jumping 6 and 9. Assistant Head Constable Suresh Malali who represented the state won a silver medal and a bronze medal.

In another feather in the cap for the Mysuru Mounted Police, SD Sasanura, Sri Chandra, MR Sandesh, Suresh Malali, and Jayaprakash came 4th and won a consolation certificate.

The City Police Commissioner and the Mounted Police Deputy Commissioner appreciated the Mounted Police Force for bringing laurels to the department. —*Salar News*

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— PTI

M'rashtra Minister drops defamation case against Raut

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Sanjay Raut said on Saturday that Maharashtra minister Dada Bhuse withdrew a defamation case against him after he expressed regret before a Nashik court, admitting his corruption allegation was based on incorrect information. The case stemmed from a 2023 article in Shiv Sena (UBT)'s mouthpiece Saamana, in which Raut accused Bhuse of involvement in a Rs 178 crore scam at the Girna Co-operative Sugar Factory in Malegaon. Appearing together before a Malegaon court, both leaders agreed to end the dispute. Raut apologised to farmers and residents for any confusion caused, while Bhuse confirmed the complaint had been withdrawn and the matter closed. —*PTI*

UK minister says Bihar 'chasing future of tech'

PATNA, 21 FEB

UK Minister for AI and Online Safety Kanishka Narayan returned to Bihar on Saturday after more than 20 years, saying the state is "chasing the future of technology". Narayan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, arrived in Patna and met Sanjay Jha of Janata Dal (United). He was in India to attend the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. Expressing delight at being back, he said Bihar has made significant progress. Jha indicated possible collaboration between Bihar and the UK in artificial intelligence, highlighting state policies on semiconductors, data and AI. He added that under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Bihar aims to remain competitive in emerging technologies. —*PTI*

All languages equally worthy of respect: Mamata

KOLKATA, 21 FEB

Mamata Banerjee on Saturday greeted people on International Mother Language Day, asserting that every language deserves equal respect and protection from any form of "attack". Paying tribute to those who lost their lives in language movements, the West Bengal Chief Minister said her government is committed to preserving linguistic diversity and has granted official recognition to several languages in the state In a post on X, she said Bengali carries a rich literary heritage, while stressing respect for all linguistic communities. Banerjee added that the state has ensured opportunities for people to study in their mother tongue and has set up language academies for various linguistic groups. —*PTI*

Satheesan denies ordering stir against Health Min

KOCHI, 21 FEB

Congress leader VD Satheesan on Saturday rejected allegations of instructing Youth Congress workers to stage a "wreath protest" at the Health Minister Veena George's residence over a surgical lapse incident. He was responding to George's allegation that Satheesan gave instructions to "attack her residence" and create violence. He alleged that activists of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the ruling CPI(M), had previously broken into the premises of his official residence, Cantonment House, and his private residence in Paravur, causing damage and assaulting visitors. George alleged that the Congress was trying to win the upcoming Assembly elections through "heinous" methods and the "attack" on her official residence was an example. —*PTI*

Cong faces heat from many quarters for AI summit stir

BJP calls stir treason, protesters as Lashkar-e-Rahul's sepoys

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

BJP workers staged demonstrations across several states on Saturday against a "shirtless" protest by India Youth Congress (IYC) activists at the India AI Impact Summit, accusing the opposition of tarnishing India's image on a global stage. Protests were held in Jammu, Jaipur, Patna, Bengaluru, Panchkula and Indore, among other cities.

On Friday, IYC workers briefly staged a dramatic protest at Bharat Mandapam, holding t-shirts with slogans critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the India-US trade deal, before being removed by security personnel.

Indian Youth Congress workers stage a 'shirtless protest' at the AI Impact Summit in Delhi on 20 February —*PTI*

BJP leaders described the protest as "treasonous." Spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi accused the Congress of attempting to "tarnish India's image in front of foreign guests," calling the act a "shameful display of pettiness and nakedness."

"The ruling party alleged that the protest amounted to "treason" as the "sepoys of Lashkar-e-Rahul" tried to tarnish India's image," the party said

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju said the protest was a "well-thought-out conspiracy" to defame the country. Senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi hit out at the Congress over the protest, saying the party has a chronology of "criminal acts" and is unable to accept that a person from a poor family is leading the country as the prime minister.

Talking to reporters here, Naqvi urged the Congress to move beyond its obsession with transforming "democracy into a Disneyland of dynasty".

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati described the act as "highly objectionable and extremely inappropriate." Telugu Desam Party Chief N Chandrababu Naidu said the protest "disrupted a prestigious international event attended by 60-70 countries" YSRCP leader YS Jagan Mohan Reddy said the protest "brought shame" and warned against demeaning the nation in any manner. —*PTI*

TO SAFEGUARD FARMERS' INTEREST

Put India-US trade deal on hold: Cong

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

With the US Supreme Court striking down President Trump's global tariffs, the Congress demanded on Saturday that Prime Minister Modi should put the India-US interim trade agreement on hold and renegotiate the deal.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the government must state categorically that there will be no import liberalisation till there are clarifications from the American side to ensure that Indian farmers' interests are not damaged.

Ramesh sought clarifications from the government on the India-US interim trade deal and called for renegotiating the deal. He asked Modi to clarify whether he agrees with Trump's statement that nothing changes in the deal with India.

Asserting that the India-US interim agreement will adversely affect farmers, Ramesh said the government should put this deal on hold till clarifications are made.

"We demand that the PM should categorically state that we will not liberalise imports after the US Supreme Court decision," Ramesh said.

"On 2 February, President Trump announced the deal stating that he is happy that a deal has been reached and as per the request of the PM this is effective immediately," he said, adding that the chronology of events is important.

The first question arises is why did the PM was in a hurry to announce this, he said.

"We believe this was connected with Rahul raising the China issue and former Army chief Naravane's book. In order to divert attention from that, Modi requested Trump to announce this," he said. —*PTI*

Infiltrators to be removed from country in 5 yrs: Shah

GUWAHATI, 21 FEB

Asserting that if India can be free of Naxals, it can also be free of infiltrators, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday that illegal immigrants would be removed not only from the electoral rolls but also from the country in the next five years.

He was addressing a gathering after laying the foundation stone for a new campus of the Assam Police 10th Battalion, which he said would be constructed on land freed from encroachments by infiltrators.

Attacking the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, he said that the Congress leader had once said that infiltrators would be removed, but the "Congress can't do that as illegals are its vote bank."

Home Minister Amit Shah presents the Operational Battalion Trophy to CRPF Commandant Amit Kumar as CM Himanta Biswa Sarma looks on —*PTI*

The Congress policy of protecting infiltrators has threatened Assam's 'jati' (people), 'mati' (land) and 'bheti' (foundation), he said. "If the Congress is committed to expel infiltrators, I challenge Rahul to mention it in its manifesto," he said. — *PTI*

IN DEFAMATION CASE

Rahul faces black flags as he appears in M'rashtra court

THANE/MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi appeared on Saturday before the Bhiwandi magistrate's court to furnish a fresh surety in a 2014 defamation case filed by an RSS activist, naming the party's Maharashtra chief Harshwardhan Sapkal as his new guarantor.

Rahul, on his way to the court in Thane district, faced a black-flag protest by BJP activists at the Mulund toll plaza, who shouted slogans, accusing the Congress of maligning India's image through the Youth Congress's protest at the AI Impact Summit in Delhi.

The Court of Joint Civil Judge and Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) PM Kolse scheduled the next hearing in the defamation case for 4 April after completing procedural formalities regarding Rahul's new surety.

Rahul had already been granted exemption from personal appearance in the case filed by RSS activist Rajesh Kunte.

Kunte had alleged that the Congress leader, while addressing a rally at Sonale village during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, stated that the Sangh was behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

The court had asked Rahul to appear before it in person to furnish a new surety in the case after the death of his previous guarantor, former Union Minister Shivraj Patil Chakurkar, on 12 December 2025.

Patil had stood as a guarantor for Rahul in 2016 when the court granted him bail.

On Saturday, the new surety proceedings were conducted fast-track, lasting approximately 15 minutes. n —*PTI*

AFTER PACT WITH DMDK

DMK forms seat-sharing panel for talks with allies

CHENNAI, 21 FEB

- The move comes shortly after the DMK finalised a poll pact with the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), dealing a blow to the rival AIADMK.

The ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has set up a seven-member committee, chaired by party treasurer TR Baalu, to negotiate seat-sharing arrangements with its allies ahead of the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly election.

The move comes shortly after the DMK finalised a poll pact with the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), dealing a blow to the rival All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which had been attempting to bring the Vijayakanth-founded party into its fold. The panel will hold discussions with partners in the Secular Progressive Alliance, including the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), VCK, CPI and CPI(M), to finalise constituencies and coordinate campaign plans.

MDMK chief Vaiko expressed confidence that the DMK, led by Chief Minister MK Stalin, would secure an outright majority, dismissing any prospect of a coalition government.

He also suggested that expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam, who recently met Mr Stalin and praised his governance, had signalled an inclination to join the DMK-led alliance.

Moreover, actor-politician Kamal Haasan, founder of Makkal Needhi Maiam said he was not directly involved in the negotiations but voiced confidence in the alliance's unity and purpose, adding that details of seat demands would be announced at the right time.—*PTI*

Ajit Pawar death: Rohit wants Civil Aviation Minister's removal

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

NCP (SP) general secretary and MLA Rohit Pawar on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding the resignation of Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu till the inquiry into Ajit Pawar's death ends.

The former Maharashtra deputy chief minister along with four others were killed in a plane crash at Baramati airport in Pune on 28 January.

In his letter, the Karjat-Jamkhed MLA, also the departed leader's nephew, claimed serious questions have arisen about the company VSR that owned the ill-fated Learjet 45 aircraft and its links with Naidu. These must be investigated by an independent and competent authority, he wrote.

"You (PM) havintere always shown respect for Ajitdada and his contribution to the country. Ram Mohan Naidu's resignation is necessary to ensure there is no influence or ference in examining whether the DGCA was compromised in any manner in relation to VSR," Rohit said in the letter.

Rohit held several press conferences to highlight issues related to the crash and raised doubts about foul play. —*PTI*

T'gana Cong, BJP workers clash over land dispute

HYDERABAD, 21 FEB

Tension prevailed in Kamareddy town after slogan-shouting Congress and BJP workers gathered at the office of BJP legislator Venkata Ramana Reddy.

Earlier, the BJP MLA and Advisor to the Telangana government, Mohammed Ali Shabbir, had made allegations and counter-allegations regarding a land issue.

Reddy challenged the Congress leader to a debate on the matter. However, police prevented Reddy from taking part in the debate.

A large number of BJP and Congress workers gathered at the venue, even as police tried to disperse them. A vehicle was damaged and overturned in the commotion.

BJP Telangana President N Ramchander Rao, in a post on X, termed the "ghastly attack by Congress workers at Reddy's office as deeply condemnable and shocking."

He further added that he will personally visit the site to stand with BJP karyakartas and assess the situation firsthand.

Kamareddy superintendent of police, Rajesh Chandra said that some people had been detained and arrests will be made by the police. —*PTI*

Central forces to be deployed in WB in March

1KOLKATA, 21 FEB

Around 480 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) will be deployed in poll-bound West Bengal from 1 March, for area domination, confidence-building measures and other election duties, an Election Commission official said on Saturday.

The first tranche of nearly 240 companies will arrive by 1 March, with the remaining 240 to be inducted by 10 March.

Personnel will be drawn from the Central Reserve Police Force, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Indo-Tibetan Border Police and the Sashastra Seema Bal. The forces will also guard EVMs at strong rooms and counting centres.

The final electoral roll, following the Special Intensive Revision, will be published on 28 February, with the election schedule expected in March. —*PTI*

KERALA SIR

T'puram has highest transgender voters

T'PURAM, 21 FEB

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday released the final electoral roll for Kerala following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), bringing the state's total voters to 2,69,53,644. The number marks a reduction from 2,78,50,855 prior to the revision, with 8,97,211 voters removed under the exercise.

The revised roll includes 1,31,26,048 male voters, 1,38,27,319 female voters and 277 transgender voters. Thiruvananthapuram constituency has the highest number of transgender voters at 15, followed by Tanur (13) and Nemom (9). Around 34 of Kerala's 140 Assembly constituencies have no registered transgender voters.

The revised electoral roll includes 1,31,26,048 males, 1,38,27,319 females and 277 transgender voters in Kerala —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Kerala also has 2,23,558 overseas voters, with the largest numbers in Kuttiadi (16,002) and Nadapuram (12,424). Of these, 1,90,090 are male, 33,458 female and 10 transgender. Kasargod constituency recorded an equal number of male and female voters at 1,04,866 each, though it has no transgender voters. While the state overall has more female than male voters, certain constituencies in Malappuram and Kasargod districts show male dominance.

During the SIR proceedings, 36.88 lakh voters were issued notices, and 53,229 were excluded from the final list. Additionally, 4,01,368 applications for correction, inclusion and deletion were received between 31 January and 16 February.

The ECI said aggrieved voters could approach the poll body for inclusion or deletion of their names, and political parties will receive the final roll for verification. Names can still be added until the last day of filing nominations for the upcoming Assembly elections. —*PTI*

Kerala Congress leader joins BJP, to contest polls

T'PURAM, 21 FEB

R Reshmi —*PTI*

Congress leader R Reshmi, who had given a stiff fight to Finance Minister KN Balagopal in the last Assembly election from the Kottarakkara constituency, joined BJP on Saturday.

Reshmi was the state General Secretary of the Mahila Congress and had been elected to local bodies multiple times.

Reshmi said she had worked as a people's representative for the Congress for the past 20 years. However, after the 2021 Assembly election, she faced bitter experiences which prompted her to distance herself from the party.

Despite the adversities, she said she remained active in the constituency.

She said Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh had recommended her candidature in the last Assembly election and supported her throughout. However, she alleged that he was under the control of a section of people in Kottarakkara.

Reshmi also recalled the support she received from Jebi Mather MP and other leaders in the Mahila Congress.

"Some people started targeting me through new media platforms for joining the NDA. But I am not ready to respond to them," she said.

BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar said she would contest the upcoming election. —*PTI*

— PTI

Helicopter ferries saints' sacred footwear to Latur

LATUR, 21 FEB

A special helicopter from Dehu and Alandi in Pune district delivered the sacred padukas (footwear) of seven saints from the Warkari tradition to Latur, marking the start of a major religious event. The occasion celebrates the 750th birth anniversary of Sant Dnyaneshwar, along with memorials for Sant Namdev, Sant Janabai, and remembrance of Sant Tukaram. Two chariots will carry the padukas to Khandapur village in a grand procession, accompanied by ceremonial horses from Alandi and Dehu performing the ringan ritual. Lakhs of devotees from across Maharashtra will participate in the ten-day devotional events. —*PTI*

Kerala NIA court denies bail to PFI leader

KOCHI, 21 FEB

A court refused bail to Ashraf, PFI's education wing in-charge, after the NIA alleged he organised armed training camps and propagated ISIS ideology. NIA Court judge MK Mohandas dismissed the plea, citing evidence of arms training at Periyar Valley and TEST, and involvement in the murder of RSS leader Sreenivasan. The NIA presented evidence including a pen drive with ISIS videos, hate speeches, and handwritten notes on knives, swords, and bombs. Defence argued Ashraf's prolonged custody and health issues. The court found reasonable grounds to believe the accusations and dismissed the bail plea, with the case now set for trial. —*PTI*

Five of family killed in Gujarat minivan crash

MEHSANA, 21 FEB

Five members of a family died and six were injured when their minivan crashed into a road divider on Unjha-Mehsana highway. The family was returning to Ahmedabad after attending a wedding in Rajasthan's Pali district. The driver lost control between Unjha and Mehsana, causing the crash, said police. Four died instantly including Ramlal, Komal, Kailashbhai, and four-year-old Ayush. One injured, Mathuradevi Kumawat, later succumbed at hospital. The injured are receiving treatment at Mehsana Civil Hospital. Police have registered a case and are conducting further investigation. —*PTI*

— PTI

No subsidies for stubble burning Bihar farmers

PATNA, 21 FEB

The Bihar government suspended DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) registration for 1,807 farmers in 2025-26 over stubble burning. Subsidies for 1,758 farmers were blocked last year, with 49 more suspended this year for violations. The state government has imposed a ban on crop residue burning, with warnings that violators would lose financial support. The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) chairperson emphasised the importance of preventing air pollution and soil degradation. Campaigns, subsidies on farm equipment, and encouragement to sell green waste for biomass briquettes aim to discourage burning. The Bihar Economic Survey noted a decline in crop burning incidents in 2025.—*PTI*

LeT 'plotting' IED hits near Red Fort, Chandni Chowk

Security tightened at religious sites after Intel alert

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Security was tightened across religious and heritage sites in Delhi on Saturday, including areas around the Red Fort and parts of Chandni Chowk, following Intelligence reports suggesting a possible terror threat, an official said.

Security agencies issued an alert on a possible explosion near Red Fort, a major tourist destination and high-security zone, after Central Intelligence agencies indicated that Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) has allegedly kept prominent religious places in India on its target list.

Sources said the inputs suggested that a temple in the Chandni Chowk area could be among the potential targets.

While Intelligence inputs are being assessed, security has been stepped up in and around religious places and crowded public areas, they added.

Security has been tightened in all religious places and crowded public locations in Old Delhi —*PTI*

Intelligence agencies indicated that the LeT could be attempting to carry out an IED attack. The alleged plan is reportedly linked to attempts by the terror group to avenge the 6 February blast at a mosque in Islamabad, sources said. Central agencies and Delhi Police units have intensified surveillance through CCTV monitoring, vehicle checks and deployment of additional personnel. —*PTI*

IEDs found in Punjab, Kashmir

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Two IEDs were found in Punjab and Kashmir as security agencies sounded a high alert in Delhi.

In Punjab, an IED was found in a bag near the Rayya police post in Amritsar on Friday. Police said the bomb disposal squad was rushed to the spot and the IED was defused.

Another IED was found at Safapora in Kashmir's Ganderbal district on Friday. The bomb detection squad (BDS) of the army and the J&K police detected the IED and defused it.

The development comes after security agencies warned of a terror plot by Lashkar targeting religious and tourist spots in Delhi. —*PTI*

SC issues orders on solid waste mgmt

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Flagging the "uneven" compliance with Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules across India, the Supreme Court said the present generation cannot afford to wait for legislative refinement while implementation gaps persist.

Observing that the right to a clean environment is an "inseparable part" of the right to life, the court issued pan-India directions to ensure that the executive has the requisite mechanism required to enforce the SWM Rules, 2026, which will be effective from 1 April.

A bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and S V N Bhatti said neglecting municipal solid waste will affect health as much as the economy and India must be fully-compliant with the 2026 Rules when the world looks at the country in technology-related activities.

"Compliance of MSW/SWM Rules meant to govern waste management remains uneven across India. While mandated at source, the segregation at source into wet, dry and hazardous streams is still not fully done in many urban and rural areas," the bench said in its 19 February order.

It said massive dumpsites remain active in metropolitan areas, though bio-remediation efforts have been initiated.

The court passed the order while hearing two appeals arising from two separate National Green Tribunal (NGT) orders concerning environmental compliances by the Bhopal Municipal Corporation under the SWM Rules, 2016.

"It is now or never. Expecting results without fundamental spadework of source segregation and infrastructure would be unreasonable. Every stakeholder is duty-bound to ensure a waste-free India," the bench said. — *PTI*

HC clears two students booked for offering namaz in prohibited place

PRAYAGRAJ, 21 FEB

The Allahabad High Court quashed criminal proceedings against two students accused of offering namaz at a place barred by the local administration.

Justice Saurabh Srivastava set aside the proceedings arising out of an FIR lodged under Sections 143 (unlawful assembly) and 188 (orders duly promulgated by government officials) of the IPC, observing that the applicants "had no criminal history." A court in Sant Kabir Nagar had issued a summons to the two students in May 2019.

The counsel for the students submitted that the two had no criminal record and had been implicated solely for intending to conduct namaz.

It was also argued that one of them was preparing for a competitive exam and the trial in such a "petty offence" could adversely affect his future.

The government advocate acknowledged the absence of criminal history but contended that certain locations had been notified as prohibited for conducting namaz to maintain order. The state submitted that the applicants insisted on conducting namaz at the restricted site. In its order dated 17 February, the court quashed the proceedings against the two students and asked them to obey the administration's orders. — *PTI*

Retired doc booked for leaving forceps inside patient

ALAPPUZHA, 21 FEB

A case has been registered against retired doctor Dr Lalithambika after an artery forceps was found inside a woman's abdomen following surgery at Alappuzha Medical College in 2021.

Usha Joseph, 51, of Punnapra, who underwent uterine fibroid removal, is now admitted to a private hospital in Kochi for surgery to remove the forceps.

Police registered the case under BNS Sections 125 and 125(a), based on a complaint lodged by Joseph's relative.

The incident sparked wide-

spread protests across Kerala, with Youth Congress activists storming the official residence of Health Minister Veena George in Thiruvananthapuram, placing a wreath and demanding her resignation. Police said only three guards were present, unable to stop the protesters, who then staged a dharna.

The protests erupted amid a row over a surgery lapse at a government medical college years ago, with George accusing Congress leader VD Satheesan of orchestrating violence. George said the treatment lapse occurred years ago and it is being investigated.

She accused the opposition of trying to win elections through violence, claiming the attack on her residence was "as per the direction of Satheesan." She also criticised the media for spreading misinformation and warned of strict action against lapses. — *PTI*

Court stand in Sabarimala case triggers controversy

T'PURAM, 21 FEB

The Kollam Vigilance Court's observation that there was "not even an iota of evidence" against Tantri Kandararu Rajeevaru in the Sabarimala gold loss case has ignited a political storm in Kerala.

BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar questioned why the Tantri was arrested despite the lack of evidence, alleging the move was meant to divert attention from former Devaswom Minister Kadakampally Surendran. The party has demanded a CBI probe. Opposition leader VD Satheesan sought clarity from the SIT on the grounds for the arrest and called for a High Court-monitored inquiry into the 40 days the Tantri spent in jail. Senior Congress leader Radhakrishnan alleged he was targeted to shield the real culprits.

Minister MB Rajesh defended the probe, stating it is under the supervision of the Kerala High Court, which has expressed satisfaction with the investigation. — *PTI*

Smog covers the Mumbai skyline as pollution levels increased in many areas of the city —*ANI*

Mumbai AQI is Feb's 5th worst

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Mumbai recorded its fifth-highest February Air Quality Index (AQI) at 130, categorised as 'moderate' by the Central Pollution Control Board's SAMEER app.

As per the CPCB's AQI-monitoring application, this was recorded on Friday evening based on data collected from monitoring stations across the city.

The AQI had touched 141 and 140 on 2 and 3 February respectively, followed by 134 on 4 February and 15 February. Except on 10, 18 and 19 February, when the AQI remained below 100, the index has mostly stayed in three digits throughout the month. .

Among prominent locations, Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), the city's key business district, recorded an AQI of 172.

Another monitoring device set up by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board in the BKC area showed a reading of 140, while neighbouring Kurla, a densely populated area, registered 160.

Deonar, known for its dumping ground and adjoining slum pockets, recorded 161. The worst reading in the city was reported from Worli, where the AQI stood at 256, placing it in the 'poor' category.

The SAMEER app data revealed that in January, there were eight days when the AQI remained below 100.However, on 22 and 26 January, the AQI rose to 133, the highest recorded during winter. According to the CPCB's classification, an AQI of up to 100 is considered 'satisfactory', although it may cause breathing discomfort.

An AQI between 101 and 200 falls in the 'moderate' category and may cause breathing discomfort among people with lung disorders, asthma and heart ailments. The SAMEER app cautioned that sustained high AQI levels could worsen respiratory problems. — *PTI*

Air quality 'moderate' in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The national capital on Saturday recorded a minimum temperature of 14.2 degrees Celsius, 2.4 notches above the season's average, says IMD.

The weather department predicted a mainly clear sky during the day with maximum temperature expected to reach around 28.4 degrees Celsius, 2.9 notches above seasonal normal.

Relative humidity was recorded at 91 per cent at 8.30 am.

The air quality was recorded in the "moderate" category at 9 am on Saturday, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) reading of 197, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board, an AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good," 51 to 100 "satisfactory," 101 to 200 "moderate," 201 to 300 "poor," 301 to 400 "very poor," and 401 to 500 "severe." — *PTI*

M'rashtra class 12 chemistry question paper leaked

NAGPUR, 21 FEB

Police are investigating a suspected leak after the class 12 Chemistry question paper was allegedly circulated on social media in Nagpur ahead of the exam being conducted by the Maharashtra board, officials said on Saturday.

The leak came to light on Wednesday at a high school examination centre after a female student's frequent visits to the washroom raised suspicion.

Invigilators seized the student's smartphone. Its analysis showed that the question paper had been shared on a WhatsApp group before the exam began, officials said, adding that possible answers were also exchanged in the same group. Based on the student's statement, another pupil is being questioned. The preliminary investigation suggests a person linked to a private coaching centre shared the question paper for money, officials said. — *PTI*

Rajasthan Cong MLA's SUV kills biker

JAIPUR, 21 FEB

Three people were killed in two road accidents in Rajasthan and UP, police said.

In Rajasthan's Tonk district, Babu Mohan Meena, 55, former sarpanch of Umar village, died after his motorcycle was involved in a head-on collision with an SUV allegedly linked to Khanpur Congress MLA Suresh Gurjar. The accident occurred near Basni Ganeshji temple on NH-52 52 on Saturday. Police said Meena died at the scene. Locals staged a protest by placing the body on the highway, causing a traffic jam.

In another incident in Kanpur, two teenagers Arsh, 15 and Mohammad Ahmad, 16 were killed on Friday night when a ready-mix concrete truck hit their scooter on Ganga Barrage Road. Police said the driver ran over them while attempting to flee and is absconding. — PTI

Cops drag protesting Goa MLA out of office

PANAJI, 21 FEB

Police allegedly dragged Revolutionary Goans Party MLA Viresh Borkar out of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) office here along with several others on Saturday after they protested there overnight against the conversion of village land into a settlement zone.

The legislator accused the police of manhandling him and submitted a breach of privilege complaint.

After the police action, the legislator and the villagers chose a different site to continue their protest against the government, while TCP minister Vishwajit Rane refused to revoke the order, calling the protesters "blackmailers." The protesters claimed that 84,000 square metres of land in Palem-Siridao village was converted into a settlement zone by the TCP department by misusing provisions in the Section 39-A of the Act.

On Friday, the villagers marched to the TCP office to hold a protest. Around 100 villagers spent the night there. On Saturday, a police team went to the TCP office and dragged out MLA Borkar from the site along with others. — *PTI*

MORE FOOD SAFETY OFFICIALS LIKELY

Vizhinjam food deaths expose staff shortage

THIRU,THAPURAM, 21 FEB

The recent death of two people after allegedly suffering food poisoning at a hotel in Vizhinjam near here, has raised questions over the adequacy of administrative measures and staffing in the food safety department.

Taking serious note of the incident, the state government has decided to appoint more Food Safety Officers (FSOs) in the Food Safety Department very soon, officials said.

The government move has also brought a ray of hope to the 152 candidates included in the KPSC rank list for appointment.

Officials said the Food Safety Commissioner will be sending a fresh proposal for the appointment of 42 more FSOs from the existing rank list.

Taking serious note of the food poisoning incident, the Kerala government has decided to appoint more Food Safety Officers (FSOs) —*ANI*

The proposal will be submitted to the Health Ministry on 23 February.

Kerala Food Safety Commissioner Afsana Perween said that the proposal would include all vacancies in the department, including the 42 FSO posts, and that the related work study report is in its final stages.

She said a work study report prepared by the Department of Administrative Reforms had recommended the appointment of 52 new FSOs. In the first phase, the government had approved only 10 of these posts, while asking the Food Safety Commissionerate to submit proposals in a phased manner.

Perween said the department took time to prepare the proposal as it wanted to include other vacancies in addition to the FSO posts.

The severe shortage of FSOs in the state came into sharp focus after the deaths of two people after eating at a restaurant in Vizhinjam near Thiruvananthapuram recently. Kerala has over five lakh registered food preparation units, but only around 170 FSOs to carry out mandatory inspections. — *PTI*

WHAT TRUMP'S NEW 10% TARIFFS MEAN FOR INDIA'S EXPORTS

India will now face a lower reciprocal tariff of 10 per cent, down from 25 per cent, after US President Donald Trump announced a new global levy on items imported into America in the wake of the Supreme Court verdict against his sweeping duties on several nations.

According to Trump's proclamation, the temporary import surcharge of 10 per cent is for a period of 150 days from 24 February.

Here is a list of key pointers to explain the meaning of this announcement for Indian companies.

TARIFF

These are customs or import duties which a country imposes on goods bought from other nations. An importer has to pay this duty to the government.

Normally, companies pass on these taxes to end users or consumers.

Import duty makes goods expensive in the importing country. Besides, a few other factors also play a role in this.

RECIPROCAL TARIFFS (RT)

The term, reciprocal tariff, was first used by the US. The Trump administration, on 2 April, 2025, announced these duties on about 60 nations, including India. It was aimed at providing a level playing field to US exporters.

For example, if a country charges X per cent duty on US goods, America will charge the same on imports of that country.

These are additional import duties, which are imposed over and above the existing or MFN (most favoured nation) levies.

NOW WHAT IS RT ON INDIA

On 2 April, 2025, the US announced 26 per cent reciprocal tariffs. Later in July, the US announced a 25 per cent RT on Indian goods entering American markets from 7 August, 2025. In August last year, the Trump administration announced additional 25 per cent tariffs on India for purchasing Russian crude oil, taking the total RT on India to 50 per cent.

Following agreement on a framework for an interim trade deal in February, the US announced that it will reduce the RT on India to 18 per cent and remove the additional 25 per cent punitive tariffs.

So at present, India's goods in the US are facing 25 per cent RT.

With the US Supreme Court striking down President Donald Trump's global tariffs and Washington issuing a new order imposing a temporary 10 per cent import surcharge, Indian goods will now face only a 10 per cent reciprocal levy from February 24, 2026.

For instance, if a product faces a 5 per cent MFN duty in America, an additional 10 per cent will be imposed now, taking the effective duty to 15 per cent. Earlier, this was 5 plus 25 per cent.

PM Narendra Modi's India now faces a lower tariff rate of 10 per cent after US President Donald Trump announced a new global levy —PTI

Trump's proclamation, dated 20 February, said: "I impose, for a period of 150 days, a temporary import surcharge of 10 per cent ad valorem on articles imported into the United States, effective February 24, 2026" at 12:01 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.

"Instead of different RTs on different countries, it is 10 per cent now on everyone for the goods which were covered under RTs," a source said.

From 7 February to 24 February, 2026, the Russia-oil penalty was removed, reducing the additional duty to 25 per cent. The February 6 joint statement proposed lowering this reciprocal tariff to 18 per cent, but the change has not yet been implemented.

Beginning 24 February, 2026, a temporary across-the-board 10 per cent tariff will apply for 150 days in addition to MFN duties, replacing the earlier reciprocal tariff structure.

AFTER 150 DAYS

There is no clarity yet about what the reciprocal tariff imposed by the US will be on countries, such as India, after the 150-day period.

INDIA-US TRADE PACT

To finalise the legal text for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the Indian team is scheduled to meet its counterparts in Washington from February 23, 2026.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, on February 20, said that India and the US are expected to sign the deal next month, and it may be operationalised in April.

EXPERT'S TAKE

Think tank GTRI said that, as the RT on Indian goods has come down to 10 per cent from 25 per cent, India should re-evaluate the trade pact with the US.

India agreed to reduce tariffs for the US based on Washington's decision to cut RT on India to 18 per cent, but now the US has reduced the RT for all nations to 10 per cent. "Deals are not charity. Both sides must gain.

Now, India's gains need fresh evaluation," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

GOODS UNDER EXEMPTED CATEGORY

A fact sheet issued by the White House noted that some goods will not be subject to the temporary import duty because of the needs of the US economy or in order to ensure the duty more effectively addresses the fundamental international payments problems facing the United States.

The goods include certain critical minerals, metals used in currency and bullion, energy, and energy products; natural resources and fertilisers that cannot be grown, mined, or otherwise produced in the United States or grown, mined, or otherwise produced in sufficient quantities to meet domestic demand; certain agricultural products, including beef, tomatoes, and oranges; pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical ingredients.

Other items are certain electronics goods; passenger vehicles, certain light trucks, certain medium and heavy-duty vehicles, buses, and certain parts of passenger vehicles, light trucks, heavy-duty vehicles, buses and certain aerospace products.

SECTORAL TARIFFS ON INDIA

The sectoral tariffs (steel, aluminium, copper at 50 per cent, and a few auto components attracting 25 per cent) will continue.

WHY IS THE US IMPOSING TARIFFS

The US has alleged that it faces a significant trade deficit with India, blaming New Delhi for imposing high tariffs on American goods, which it says restricts US exports to the Indian market.

BILATERAL TRADE

During 2021-25, the US was India's largest trading partner in goods. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in bilateral trade. In 2024-25, the bilateral trade touched USD 186 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports and USD 45.3 billion imports).

With America, India had a trade surplus (the difference between imports and exports) of USD 41 billion in 2024-25. It was USD 35.32 billion in 2023-24 and USD 27.7 billion in 2022-23.

In services, India exported an estimated USD 28.7 billion and imported USD 25.5 billion, adding a USD 3.2 billion surplus.

Altogether, India ran a total trade surplus of about USD 44.4 billion with the US.

MAJOR TRADED PRODUCTS BETWEEN COUNTRIES

In 2024, India's main exports to the US included drug formulations and biologicals (USD 8.1 billion), telecom instruments (USD 6.5 billion), precious and semi-precious stones (USD 5.3 billion), petroleum products (USD 4.1 billion), vehicle and auto components (USD 2.8 billion), gold and other precious metal jewellery (USD 3.2 billion), ready-made garments of cotton, including accessories (USD 2.8 billion), and products of iron and steel (USD 2.7 billion).

Imports included crude oil (USD 4.5 billion), petroleum products (USD 3.6 billion), coal, coke (USD 3.4 billion), cut and polished diamonds (USD 2.6 billion), electric machinery (USD 1.4 billion), aircraft, spacecraft and parts (USD 1.3 billion), and gold (USD 1.3 billion).

As per estimates, US services imports from India amounted to USD 40.6 billion in calendar year 2024, with computer/information services imports at USD 16.7 billion and business management/consulting at USD 7.5 billion. —PTI

SALAR ساہر

Trump built his presidency on tariffs — now chaos looms

—FREEPIK

President Donald Trump suffered a significant political and legal setback on Friday after the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that he lacked the authority to declare an economic emergency and impose sweeping new tariffs without congressional approval.

In a 6–3 decision, the Court delivered a rare rebuke to a president who has made tariffs the cornerstone of his economic agenda. The ruling blocks Trump from unilaterally launching broad new taxes on imports under the emergency powers he had cited.

Trump reacted furiously, describing the judgment as "deeply disappointing" and "ridiculous". Speaking at an afternoon press briefing, he said he was "absolutely ashamed" of the six justices who ruled against him for "not having the courage to do what's right for our country".

"They're just being fools and lap dogs for the RINOs and the radical left Democrats," he said, referring to "Republicans in Name Only". "They're very unpatriotic and disloyal to our Constitution."

According to two people familiar with the matter, Trump learned of the decision when he was handed a note during a private meeting with several governors. Another individual briefed on the exchange said the president remarked that he had "to do something about these courts". The meeting ended shortly afterwards.

Despite the ruling, Trump vowed to press ahead, saying he would bypass Congress and seek to impose tariffs under other existing laws. The White House is now examining alternative statutory routes to preserve elements of his trade policy, though any such move is likely to face fresh legal challenges and prolong political uncertainty over international trade during an election year.

Tariffs have formed the bedrock of Trump's economic pitch to voters ahead of the midterm elections. He has frequently described "tariff" as his favourite word in the dictionary and has argued that import taxes would force factories to relocate to the United States, creating jobs and revitalising domestic industry. He has also warned that removing the tariffs could plunge the country into a deep recession.

On Thursday night, speaking at Coosa Steel in the swing state of Georgia, Trump used the word "tariff" 28 times. The steel company has credited the import duties with helping its products compete against cheaper goods from China.

"Without tariffs, this country would be in such trouble right now," Trump said. He complained that he had been forced to wait for the Court's decision despite believing the law was on his side. "The language is clear that I have the right to do it as president," he insisted. "I have the right to put tariffs on for national security purposes, countries that have been ripping us off for years."

The Court disagreed.

The ruling hands ammunition to Trump's critics, who argue that he overstepped his authority and imposed what were effectively tax increases on American consumers and businesses without congressional consent. It also revives long-standing constitutional tensions over the separation of powers, particularly Congress's authority under Article I to regulate trade.

Senator Mitch McConnell welcomed the decision, describing Trump's claim that he could sidestep Congress as "illegal". In a statement praising the judgment, the former Senate Republican leader said: "Congress's role in trade policy, as I have warned repeatedly, is not an inconvenience to avoid. If the executive would like to enact trade policies that impact American producers and consumers, its path forward is crystal clear: convince their representatives under Article 1."

Former Vice-President Mike Pence, who served during Trump's first term, also applauded the ruling. He called it a victory for the Constitution, the separation of powers and free trade. "American families and American businesses pay American tariffs — not foreign countries," Pence wrote on social media. "With this decision, American families and businesses can breathe a sigh of relief."

Democrats moved swiftly to capitalise on the moment. Representative Suzan DelBene said the ruling confirmed that Trump "is not a king" and that his tariffs "were always illegal". She criticised Republicans in Congress for failing to challenge the president sooner. "Instead, they chose to bend the knee to Trump while families, small businesses, and farmers suffered from higher prices," she said.

Public opinion has consistently shown unease with Trump's tariff strategy. An AP-NORC poll in January found that around six in ten Americans believed he had gone too far in imposing new import duties. A separate poll conducted last April showed that 76 per cent of respondents thought his tariff policies would increase the cost of consumer goods — a worrying statistic for a president elected on promises to tackle affordability.

Within his own party, Trump's aggressive use of tariffs has generated discomfort. At least seven Republican senators have voiced concerns at various points during his second term. Earlier this month, six House Republicans joined Democrats in voting for a resolution opposing Trump's tariffs on Canada.

Free trade had long been a defining principle of the Republican Party before Trump's rise. His efforts to reshape the party's trade agenda have forced many lawmakers to defend measures critics characterise as taxes on American households.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that foreign governments would bear the cost of his tariffs and that the resulting revenues would be sufficient to reduce the national debt and even fund dividend cheques for taxpayers. Economists and independent analyses have disputed those assertions, arguing that much of the burden falls on US importers and consumers. —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Uncertainty deepens for business in US & abroad after court verdict

—FREEPIK

Businesses across the United States and beyond are grappling with fresh uncertainty after the US Supreme Court struck down tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump under emergency powers legislation — only for the president to vow to reinstate them through alternative legal means.

Within hours of the judgment, Trump pledged to work around the ruling. He said he would invoke a different law to impose a 10 per cent tariff on all imports for 150 days and explore further measures against countries he accuses of unfair trade practices.

The administration maintains that tariffs bolster American manufacturing and reduce the trade deficit. Yet many US companies say they have been forced to raise prices and restructure operations to absorb higher costs.

Michael Pearce, an economist at Oxford Economics, warned that any short-term benefit from lifting tariffs could be blunted by ongoing policy instability.

"Any boost to the economy from lowering tariffs in the near-term is likely to be partly offset by a prolonged period of uncertainty," he said. "With the administration likely to rebuild tariffs through other, more durable, means, the overall tariffs rate may yet end up settling close to current levels."

One immediate complication concerns refunds. Between 133 billion and 175 billion US dollars in tariffs have been collected under measures now deemed unlawful. Reclaiming those sums is expected to be complex and costly, likely favouring large corporations with the legal and financial resources to pursue claims. Consumers hoping for reimbursement are unlikely to receive compensation.

Many businesses are bracing for years of litigation.

Basic Fun, a Florida-based toy manufacturer behind brands including Lincoln Logs and Tonka trucks, has joined a wave of companies seeking to recover tariffs paid to the government. Its chief executive, Jay Foreman, said he fears a "perpetual fight" over tariffs for the next three years. Although he does not expect new measures to target toys directly, he remains wary of prolonged instability.

Daniel Posner, owner of Grapes The Wine Co. in White Plains, New York, faces immediate practical dilemmas. With shipments taking roughly a fortnight to cross the Atlantic, he is unsure whether consignments arriving days after the ruling will be subject to the newly proposed 10 per cent levy.

"We're reactive to what's become a very unstable situation," he said.

For Ron Kurnik, who runs Superior Coffee Roasting Co. in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, the past year has been punishing. In addition to US tariffs, he faced retaliatory Canadian duties while exporting coffee. His company has raised prices by 6 per cent twice since the measures took effect. Though he welcomes the court's decision, he doubts he will ever recover what he has paid.

"It's like a nightmare we just want to wake up from," he said.

Industry groups seized on the ruling to urge a recalibration of trade policy. The Business Roundtable, which represents more than 200 major US companies, encouraged the administration to narrow future tariffs to clearly defined cases involving unfair practices or national security.

Retailers, meanwhile, have adopted varied strategies to cope — absorbing part of the costs, cutting expenses and diversifying supply chains. Even so, many have passed on price increases at a time when consumers are already sensitive to inflation.

Dave French of the National Retail Federation said he hoped lower courts would establish "a seamless process" for refunding unlawful tariffs, an issue the Supreme Court did not address.

The technology sector has also endured disruption. Many products are assembled abroad or rely on imported components. The Computer & Communications Industry Association, representing companies employing more than 1.6 million people, said it hoped the ruling would ease trade tensions and restore stability.

Farmers have likewise felt the strain, facing higher prices for equipment and fertiliser alongside weaker export demand. The American Farm Bureau Federation urged the president not to use other legal avenues to impose tariffs on agricultural inputs that would further raise costs.

However, not all industries stand to benefit from the court's decision. Tariffs imposed under different statutory authorities remain in force, including duties on steel and certain furniture products. The Home Furnishings Association noted that tariffs on steel, upholstered furniture, kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities are unaffected.

At Revolution Brewing in Chicago, aluminium for drinks cans — sourced from Canada — now costs as much as the beer ingredients themselves. Those metal tariffs were not covered by the ruling. Managing partner Josh Deth said the company is also grappling with volatile barley prices and slowing demand for craft beer.

"Everything kind of adds up," he said. "The beverage industry needs relief here. We're getting crushed by the prices of aluminium."

Overseas, reaction has been cautious rather than celebratory. Italian winemakers, for whom the United States is the largest export market, warned that the decision may prolong uncertainty. Sales to the US have tripled in value over the past two decades, but earlier threats of tariffs as high as 200 per cent on EU wine sent shockwaves through the sector.

Lamberto Frescobaldi, president of UIV, which represents more than 800 Italian producers, said there remains a significant risk that tariffs will be reimposed through alternative legal channels. —PTI

Don imposes 10% tariffs on all countries

Don invokes never before used law to bypass SC

WASHINGTON, 21 FEB

US President Donald Trump on Friday signed an order making 10 per cent global tariff on all countries, effective "almost immediately", even if higher levies were in place earlier.

This comes after the US Supreme Court struck down the country specific tariffs that Trump imposed on nations under emergency economic powers.

"It is my great honour to have just signed, from the Oval Office, a global 10 per cent tariff on all Countries, which will be effective almost immediately," Trump posted on Truth Social.

A White House official stated that this new tariff will remain in place until another authority is invoked. The White House released a fact sheet saying that these will be "a temporary import duty".

Trump said that he imposed the new tariffs under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 and will begin investigations of unfair trade practices allowing further tariffs. He asserted that he had the authority to impose additional tariffs under existing statutes without Congressional approval.

The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 on Friday that the Trump administration exceeded its legal authority by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 to impose broad-based import tariffs.

- A White House official stated that this new tariff will remain in place until another authority is invoked. Meanwhile, the White House released a fact sheet saying that these will be "a temporary import duty".

Notably, Section 122 has never been used, and therefore courts have had no occasion to interpret its language. The law however, place limits on such tariffs, which may be imposed by the President for "a period not exceeding 150 days", and are "not to exceed 15 percent".

Canada and Mexico will be exempted from the new temporary duty in alignment with the North American trade pact, the White House said. Also exempt are certain food products, such as beef and tomatoes, and critical minerals.

Speaking at the White House on Friday, Trump also indicated that he would pursue other alternatives to slap tariffs on countries across the globe.

"We have alternatives—great alternatives and we'll be a lot stronger for it," Trump stated. —*Agencies*

President Donald Trump speaks during a press briefing at the White House on Friday in Washington —*PTI*

—US SOUTHERN COMMAND

US strike on suspected drug boat kills three

WASHINGTON, 21 FEB

The US military said on Friday that it has carried out another deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs found in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. US Southern Command said on social media that the boat "was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations." It reported that the strike killed three people. A video linked to the post shows a boat floating in the water before bursting into flames. Friday's attack raises the death toll from the Trump administration's strikes on alleged drug boats to at least 148 people in at least 43 attacks since early September in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. Critics question the legality and effectiveness of the strikes. —*PTI*

Hong Kong offers to buy apartments for fire victims

HONG KONG, 21 FEB

Hong Kong officials on Saturday unveiled resettlement plans for thousands displaced by the deadliest blaze in decades last November, proposing to buy back homeownership rights from fire victims. Almost three months after the blaze spread across seven apartment buildings in Wang Fuk Court, former occupants have been living in uncertainty. The government is offering rental grants to help homeowners pay for temporary accommodation. Officials said homeowners can sell their ownership rights for cash or exchange for an apartment under a designated policy. Authorities estimated buying back about 1,700 units would cost HKD 6.8 billion. The blaze killed 168 people on 26 November, 2025, and investigations are continuing. —*PTI*

Five terrorists, two security personnel killed in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, 21 FEB

Two security personnel lost their lives during a suicide attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bannu district, Pakistan's military confirmed. The operation targeted members of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), referred to by authorities as Fitna al Khwarij. During the raid, five terrorists from the group were reportedly killed. The security forces intercepted a vehicle-borne suicide bomber, preventing an attack on any civilians and on law enforcement. A fierce exchange of fire ensued, resulting in five terrorists' deaths. The terrorists rammed the explosive-laden vehicle into a convoy, killing Lieutenant Colonel Shahzada Gul Faraz and Sepoy Karamat Shah. The incident highlights the counter-terrorism efforts in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. —*PTI*

Hungary to block EU loan to Ukraine over oil shipments

BUDAPEST, 21 FEB

Hungary has announced it will block a 90-billion-euro (USD 106-billion) EU loan to Ukraine until Russian oil shipments via the Druzhba pipeline are restored. The pipeline, which supplies Russian crude across Ukraine into Central Europe, was damaged by a Ukrainian drone attack in January. Hungary and Slovakia, which have temporary exemptions from EU Russian oil sanctions, accuse Ukraine of deliberately delaying supplies. Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó called Ukraine's actions "blackmail" and said Hungary would withhold the EU loan, which was approved in December. The decision follows Hungary's suspension of diesel shipments to Ukraine and reflects ongoing tensions over energy supplies amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán emphasises energy independence but faces criticism over his stance. —*PTI*

5 Russian aircrafts intercepted near Alaska

ANCHORAGE, 21 FEB

The North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) intercepted five Russian aircraft, including two Tu-95s, two Su-35s, and an A-50,in international airspace off Alaska's coast. Officials said the planes were not seen considered a threat.

The Russian aircrafts stayed in international airspace, never entering US or Canadian territory, and that such routine activity is not considered a threat, NORAD said.

These zones start where sovereign airspace ends. However, an international aircraft must identify themselves upon entry for security, NORAD said.

The Russian aircraft were operating near the Bering Strait, an 80-kilometre-wide waterway between the Pacific and Arctic oceans, within the Alaskan Air Defence Identification Zone.

In response to the Russian aircraft, NORAD launched two F-16s, two F-35s, one E-3 and four KC-135 refuelling tankers to intercept, identify and escort the Russian aircraft until they departed the area.

NORAD is headquartered at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado, but has its Alaska operations based in Anchorage. —*PTI*

POTUS said that 32,000 were killed in Iran's protest crackdown,while Iran's government has put the figure at 3,117 —*X@HRANA_ENGLISH*

32,000 killed in Iran protests: Trump

WASHINGTON/ TEHRAN, 21 JAN

US President Donald Trump said that 32,000 people were killed during Iran's crackdown on the protests over the country's failing economy in January, a figure significantly higher than what the Islamic Republic has claimed.

"32,000 people were killed over a relatively short period of time," Trump told reporters on Friday. "I feel very badly for the people of Iran."

Iran's government has put the figure at 3,117, which Iran's Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi reiterated on Saturday as he released a list of the victims. However, the Theocracy's toll is widely believed to be an undercount. The Human Rights Activists News Agency, a non-governmental organisation based in Washington, DC, estimated around 7,015 deaths as of 15 February and noted another 11,744 deaths are under review.

TRUMP MULLS LIMITED STRIKES

Responding to a question Trump said that he is considering "limited strikes" on Iran amid a massive buildup of US military in the region. While Trump had initially threatened to strike Iran over its crackdown on dissenters, he has recently shifted to their nuclear enrichment programme.

"They better negotiate a fair deal," Trump said.

Axios also reported that the REpublican President is considering killing Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his son Mojtaba if the nuclear negotiations don't go well.

'DRAFT DEAL READY IN FEW DAYS'

Meanwhile, Araghchi said that Iran would have a draft proposal over its nuclear enrichment ready in two-three days and that more negotiations with the US were possible in the next week or so.

—*Agencies*

US plans to reopen Syrian embassy after 14 years

The Trump administration informed the Congress that it intends to reopen the US Embassy in Damascus, Syria, which was shut in 2012 during the devastating civil war. In a letter, it said it plans to reopen the embassy in a phased operation, but the State Department has not provided any details so far.

Neal Katyal: The Indian-origin lawyer at the center of the tariff fight

NEW YORK, 21 FEB

At the centre of the landmark US Supreme Court verdict striking down President Donald Trump's sweeping global tariffs is an Indian-origin lawyer who argued before America's highest court about the illegality of the levies.

Neal Katyal, the son of Indian immigrants and former acting solicitor general under former president Barack Obama, argued the tariff case on behalf of small businesses and won.

Katyal, in an interview to, said "One of the great things about the American system is what just happened today. I was able to go to court - the son of immigrants — able to go to court and say on behalf of small businesses, 'this President is acting illegally.'"

"That is something so extraordinary about this country. The idea that we have a system that self-corrects, that allows us to say 'You might be the most powerful man but you still can't break the Constitution,'' he said.

Katyal was born in 1970 in Chicago to a paediatrician mother and engineer father, both Indian immigrants. Katyal is a partner of Milbank LLP and a member of the firm's Litigation & Arbitration Group in Washington. Katyal has argued 54 cases before the Supreme Court of the United States. —*Agencies*

At least 12 fatalities reported in the Bekaa region and 2 in a nearby refugee camps —*x*

Israeli strikes kill 14 in Lebanon

BEIRUT, 21 FEB

Israeli strikes caused a least 12 fatalities reported in the Lebanon's Bekaa region and 2 in a nearby refugee camp, the Lebanese Health Ministry reported.

Additionally, an Israeli strike on a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon earlier in day killed two more people.

Local television footage from the scene of one of the strikes in the Bekaa showed that the targeted site appeared to be an apartment building, while Israel claimed that it hit a Hezbollah "command centre".

Earlier on Friday, another Israeli strike hit a Palestinian refugee camp in the port city of Sidon, Lebanon, reportadly killing two people.

The Israeli military claimed it struck a "Hamas command center" in the Ein el-Hilweh camp, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon.

The death toll is among the highest recently, and comes as the US and Israel are threatening to strike Iran – a backer of Hezbollah and Hamas.

Following the 7 October 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel, Hezbollah began firing rockets from Lebanon to support Palestinians.

This escalated into full-scale war in September 2024, which was finally stopped—by a US-brokered ceasefire. However, since then, Israel has conducted near-daily strikes on Lebanon. —*PTI*

E5 to use Ukraine expertise to make cheap drone defence

WARSAW, 21 FEB

Five European nations have announced a new program to produce low-cost air defence systems and autonomous drones using Ukraine's hard-won expertise.

Friday's initiative of the E5 nations — France, Poland, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy — comes as one of many European efforts to bolster defence along their borders, like a "drone wall" with Russia and Ukraine to better detect, track and intercept drones violating Europe's airspace.

Those efforts were sparked by a spate of incidents in which Europe's borders and airports have been tested by rogue drones. Russia has been blamed for some of them but denies its role.

Poland is already working with Ukraine on drone technology in joint military training programs and manufacturing projects.

A budget for the plan has not been confirmed, but UK Defence Minister Luke Pollard told reporters in Poland that each country was making a "multimillion pound, multi-million euro" commitment to the scheme.

The E5 nations — France, Poland, Germany, UK and Italy — are making efforts to bolster defence along their bordersn—*X@DEFENCEU*

"We need to match the cost of the threats with defence cost," he said.

When Russian drones entered Polish airspace in September 2025, Warsaw and its NATO allies used multimillion-dollar jets to respond to drones that only cost thousands and that ended up crashing into the countryside. Low-cost kinetic or electronic effectors would allow the detection and destruction of drones at a fraction of the price. —*PTI*

It's okay if Israel takes over the Middle East: US Envoy

WASHINGTON, 21 FEB

Israel has the biblical right to take over the Middle East, US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee told Conservative podcaster Tucker Carlson on an episode that aired on Friday.

"It would be fine if they took it all," Huckabee said, while discussing the Old Testament and the Bible. "Israel is a land that God gave, through Abraham, to a people that he chose. It was a people, a place and a purpose."

Such a swath would encompass modern-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and parts of Saudi Arabia or from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River, the Trump appointee said, pointing to the Book of Gensis.

Carlson, who appeared to be taken aback, asked if the US would approve such a move, to which Huckabee said that Israel wasn't actively pursuing the project – often called the 'Greater Israel' by Zionists.

The remarks are the most explicit endorsement of the project recently, even though Huckabee tried to claim that it was only a "hyperbolic statement". —*Agencies*

VIA SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Lanka govt 'targeting' Buddhism: Monks

COLOMBO, 21 FEB

A section of the powerful Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka has criticised the government over what they termed an "organised campaign being run by vested interests to sully Buddhism", the majority religion, and monks.

Issuing a 10-point ultimatum, the monks said the stature of Buddhism and monks was being "politically undermined" and called for urgent government attention.

Addressing a gathering, leading monk Muruththettuwe Ananda said President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had called him to persuade him from going ahead with the meeting, attended by monks from all provinces.

"He asked me to come to have talks with him and to stop this," Ananda said.

Article 9 of the country's constitution warrants the head of state and the government to foster Buddhism, the religion of 74 per cent of the population.

Powerful Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka has criticised the government over an 'organised campaign to sully Buddhism" —*XINHUA*

The monks claimed that "organised social media campaigns are being run by vested interests and the government needs to pay attention to it".

"We urge the government to stop it," Ven Kotapola Rathanapala, another leading monk, said.

- The monks have said that the stature of Buddhism and monks has been politically undermined, they are calling for urgent government attention and intervention.

MPS' PENSION SCRAPPED

The Sri Lankan government has gazetted the Parliamentary Pensions (Repeal) Act after it was passed by parliament with an overwhelming majority on Tuesday, fulfilling a key campaign promise of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to scrap parliamentarians' pension.

The repeal of the 1977 pensions law comes as one of the NPP government's popular reformist electoral pledges, by terming them as "unjustified political perks". Such savings are to be directed to fund other essential public services.

With the issuing of the gazette, the payment of pensions to parliamentarians would stop. —*PTI*

Curfew in Nepal after clashes between two groups

KATHMANDU, 21 FEB

The local administration has imposed curfew in parts of Nepal's Gaur Municipality following clashes between two groups that heightened tensions on Saturday. The order was issued after a confrontation in Ward 6, Sabgadh, created a tense situation.

Chief District Officer Dinesh Sagar Bhusal stated that the restriction was enforced to prevent further deterioration and to maintain control, with security personnel deployed to manage the situation. The curfew area includes the Gaur Customs Office, extending east to Mudbalwa Gate, west to Lalkaiya embankment, and north to Bam Canal.

Tensions escalated after a vehicle was set on fire during the clashes. Despite a six-point agreement reached on Friday evening, stone-pelting resumed at around 9am on Saturday, further aggravating tensions. Dozens of police and Armed Police Force personnel have been mobilised to restore order, with authorities urging restraint.

The dispute reportedly began during a wedding procession in Sabgadh, involving an argument between members of two communities, which lead to injuries and unrest. —*AGENCIES*

Curfew imposed in southern Nepal after violent clashes between two groups, check restrictions —*PTI*

86 nations endorse AI Summit declaration

IT Minister said it democratises AI resources so that facilities & technology reach all

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

As many as 86 countries, including US, UK, Canada, China and Germany and two international organisations have signed the AI Impact Summit declaration, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday said.

The strong global backing for the declaration comes at the conclusion of the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi.

Vaishnaw that nations across the world have formalised and upheld principles of 'welfare of all, and happiness of all'.

"…Democratising artificial intelligence resources so AI facilities, services and technology can reach everyone in society has been accepted by all," Vaishnaw said.

Balancing economic growth with social good has been prioritised, he added.

Other major areas of thrust include innovations and development of human capital.

The mega AI Impact Summit secured investment commitments of over USD 250 billion in infrastructure alone.

Vaishnaw had said participation at the summit crossed five lakh visitors, reflecting strong domestic and global engagement with India's AI push. The India AI Impact Summit brought together global policymakers, industry leaders and technology experts, positioning India as a key player in shaping international AI governance and infrastructure development. Be it the ministerial dialogue, the leaders' plenary, the main inauguration function, or the Summit overall, the quality of participation and dialogue was phenomenal, Vaishnaw had pointed out. *—PTI*

Delegates from different countries with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the AI Impact Summit in Delhi *-PTI*

AI amplifies human value, not redundancy: Cisco Prez

Jeetu Patel, President and Chief Product Officer at Cisco, has dismissed fears that artificial intelligence could render humans redundant, saying such concerns misunderstand the complementary role AI is set to play. Patel said the real breakthrough lies in combining human judgement and instinct with machine-scale automation. While AI systems are advancing rapidly — from chatbots to autonomous agents — they are tools designed to augment human capability, not replace it. He acknowledged that automation will reshape the labour market and that some roles may disappear. *—PTI*

AI IN LEGAL SECTOR NEEDS ETHICAL RULES, DATA SAFETY: EXPERTS

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Legal experts have highlighted both the promise and the risks of artificial intelligence in India's legal sector, as the country hosts the AI Impact Summit-2026.

Ajay Bhargava, senior partner at Khaitan & Co, said AI is set to enhance legal capabilities but cannot replace the intuition, ethical reasoning or strategic judgement of experienced advocates. He cautioned that over-reliance on AI-generated drafts could result in inaccuracies, making rigorous human verification essential. He also stressed the need for clear ethical guidelines and strong data protection laws to govern AI use by lawyers.

Advocate Tarun Rana described AI as a valuable research support tool that can quickly identify relevant case law and statutory provisions. However, he warned that it may produce outdated, overruled or incorrect citations, or misinterpret judgments, and must not be blindly trusted.

Sudhir Mishra, managing partner of Trust Legal, said AI use remains largely confined to urban centres and is not a decision-making tool. He noted concerns raised by the Supreme Court of India over faulty AI-generated citations, emphasising lawyers' duty to verify all references. *—PTI*

Navi Mumbai airport launches DigiYatra facility

MUMBAI, 21 FEB

Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) has introduced DigiYatra nearly two months after commencing commercial operations. The airport joined the Ministry of Civil Aviation's nationwide DigiYatra expansion alongside five other airports, according to a statement issued on 20 February. The launch of the facility was conducted remotely, with proceedings streamed live inside the terminal for passengers. To mark the occasion, three travellers ceremonially passed through the DigiYatra e-gates and carried out a ribbon-cutting at the biometric entry points. DigiYatra uses facial recognition technology to facilitate seamless, contactless and paperless passenger processing at checkpoints in the airport, helping to reduce the waiting times for passengers, while ensuring strong data privacy and security safeguards. *—PTI*

IOB Officers' Association calls for strike in March

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The Indian Overseas Bank Officers' Association (IOBOA) has announced a nationwide one-day strike on 2 March, alleging coercive surveillance and unfair workplace practices by the management of Indian Overseas Bank. Supporting the action, the All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) said officers are being subjected to forced late sittings, end-of-day restrictions and measures that undermine dignity and professional autonomy. It claimed repeated representations on staff morale and mental well-being have gone unanswered. The confederation also described the reported locking of the association's office after the strike notice as "draconian" and an attack on trade union rights. Protests are scheduled for 23 and 26 February, culminating in the 2 March strike. *—PTI*

RBI policy rate pause expected: ICICI Bank report

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

ICICI Bank Global Markets expects a prolonged policy pause through 2026–27, citing low hike odds amid benign core inflation, with focus shifting to sustained liquidity injections to support monetary transmission. ICICI Bank said upside inflation shocks appear unlikely given the latest core inflation data, and higher oil prices support a rate pause. Minutes from the monetary policy meeting showed a more optimistic growth outlook, citing high-frequency indicators and recent US and EU trade deals. Growth was revised up 20 points for H1 2026–27. Most members said the inflation outlook remains benign despite higher CPI projections, revised up due to rising precious metal prices. On 6 February, the RBI unanimously decided to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent, while continuing with a neutral policy stance. *—ANI*

TARIFFS CHAOS

US SC order a relief to Indian exporters: Grant Thornton

GURUGRAM, 21 FEB

Indian exporters will receive immediate relief following the US Supreme Court's ruling on the US administration tariffs, Manoj Mishra, partner at Grant Thornton Bharat said.

The US Supreme Court has struck down a huge chunk of President Donald Trump's far-reaching tariff agenda.

The majority ruled 6-3 that the law undergirding those import duties "does not authorize the President to impose tariffs."

However, Trump announced a sweeping new 10% global tariff across all trading partners.

The president also defended the India trade arrangement, calling it fair and reiterating that the United States will not face duties under the pact.

Mishra said, "Indian exporters will not be required to pay that 25% reciprocal tariff. Even if we would have entered into an Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), it would have been reduced to only 18%."

"That will be a little disadvantage for us, but overall, since the product cost will go down in the USA and in a price-sensitive market, our MSMEs and products like textiles will get an advantage. It will be like a lifeline for them," Mishra explained

India would miss the slight advantage it had under the BTA, where it was supposed to pay only 18% reciprocal tariff versus 25% for competitors from other labeling countries.

Mishra was also skeptical about whether the US would refund money collected through the Trump tariffs.

Mishra suggested that discussions with the US should focus on seeking some leeway in the bi-lateral trade agreement, particularly on provisions affecting the farmers in India. *—PTI*

PHONEPE LAUNCHES AI SEARCH BUILT ON MICROSOFT FOUNDRY

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

PhonePe launched an AI-powered natural language search feature on Saturday, built using Microsoft Foundry. The feature allows users to navigate, pay and track transactions on the app through simple voice or text commands.

The feature replaces menu navigation with intent-based routing, letting users complete tasks conversationally. Commands like "Pay Hemanth 20 rupees" open the payment screen with the recipient pre-selected, while "Recharge FASTag" or "Gold price" route users to the relevant service or page.

Beyond basic navigation, the tool interprets user intent for payments, purchases, or support. By leveraging a hybrid on-device and cloud inferencing model, it ensures all personal and transactional data remains securely within the PhonePe environment.

Rahul Chari, Founder, Whole-time Director and CTO of PhonePe, said the launch marks a shift from payment apps being purely transactional tools to more intelligent, user-centric platforms. It reflects adoption of natural language interfaces. *—PTI*

TOOL TO FIX SECURITY GLITCH

Cybersecurity stocks hit by Anthropic's AI security tool

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Shares of companies in the cyber security solutions space have nosedived after American-based AI company, Anthropic PBC, unveiled a tool capable of autonomously finding and patching possible software vulnerabilities.

JFrog shares were 24 per cent down, CrowdStrike Holdings' shares were 8 per cent down, Okta was over 9 per cent down, and GitLab was over 8 per cent.

Similarly, shares of Zscaler, Rubrik Inc, and Palo Alto Networks also dropped sharply, data showed.

Anthropic's Claude Code Security is a new capability built into Claude Code on the web. The company said it is now available in a limited research preview.

"It scans codebases for security vulnerabilities and suggests targeted software patches for human review, allowing teams to find and fix security issues that traditional methods often miss," the company said in a statement.

Claude Code Security is intended to put solutions squarely in the hands of defenders and protect code against this what it said new category of AI-enabled attack.

Ever since the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, many have been apprehensive that AI-integrated companies may emerge as competitors.

There's growing investor angst over generative AI software coding tools and automated AI assistants, and how they might impact software companies, their broader business outlook and, in particular, their profit margins—*ANI*

CleanMax gets Rs 921 cr from investors

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

CleanMax Enviro Energy Solutions raised Rs 921 crore from anchor investors on Friday ahead of its Rs 3,100 crore IPO, which opens for public subscription on February 23 and closes February 25.

The renewable energy firm allotted 87,46,437 shares at Rs 1,053 each to anchor investors, with domestic institutions taking 68 per cent and foreign investors 32 per cent.

High-profile participants in the anchor round included Temasek Holdings, Nomura Asset Management, ADIA, SBI Life, HDFC Mutual Fund, Tata Investment Corp, Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, Eastspring, SBI General, Premji Invest, and 360 One Mutual Fund, according to BSE's website.

The IPO is priced at Rs 1,000–1,053 per share, valuing CleanMax at Rs 12,325 crore at the upper end. The issue comprises a fresh share sale worth up to Rs 1,200 crore and an offer-for-sale of Rs 1,900 crore by investor shareholders.

Financially, the company reported a 13 per cent rise in revenue from operations to Rs 1,610.34 crore in FY25 from Rs 1,425.31 crore in FY24, and turned profitable with a net profit of Rs 27.84 crore.

CleanMax operates onsite solar projects across 21 Indian states and expanded internationally. It has energy plants in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. *—PTI*

Nadda launches India-made tetanus and diphtheria vaccine

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Saturday launched the indigenously manufactured tetanus and adult diphtheria (Td) vaccine at the Central Research Institute in Himachal Pradesh's Kasauli.

The Td vaccine has now been introduced for supply under the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP).

The Central Research Institute will supply 55 lakh doses to the UIP by April, with production expected to scale up progressively in subsequent years.

Nadda congratulated the scientists, technical experts and staff of the research institute, saying the launch marks a significant step towards safeguarding national health security and strengthening public health infrastructure.

The government has set clear targets for achieving self-reliance in the health and pharmaceutical sectors.

He further noted that India has achieved Maturity Level 3 in the World Health Organization's global benchmarking of regulatory systems, reflecting the robustness of its vaccine regulatory framework.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India developed two indigenous vaccines within nine months and administered over 220 crore doses, including booster doses.

Under the Vaccine Maitri initiative, India supplied vaccines to nearly 100 countries, of which 48 countries received vaccines free of cost.

Nadda emphasised that CRI is the first government institute to manufacture vaccines under good manufacturing practices standards.

UIP provides 11 vaccines against 12 vaccine-preventable diseases. *—PTI*

'MORE JOBS WILL BE LOST'

Firms using 'AI washing' to mask global lay-offs: Altman

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said some companies are engaging in "AI washing" when it comes to layoffs, or falsely attributing workforce reductions to the technology's impact.

Altman clarified he anticipates more job displacement as a result of AI, as well as the emergence of new roles complementing the technology.

"We'll find new kinds of jobs, as we do with every tech revolution," he said. "But I would expect that the real impact of AI doing jobs will begin to be palpable." Altman said at the India AI Impact Summit on 19 February.

A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that of thousands of surveyed C-suite executives across US, UK, Germany and Australia, nearly 90 per cent said AI had no impact on workplace employment over the past three years following the late-2022 release of ChatGPT.

However, prominent tech leaders like Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei have warned of a white-collar bloodbath, with AI potentially wiping out 50 per cent of entry-level office jobs. Klarna CEO Sebastian Siemiatkowski suggested this week the buy-now, pay-later firm would reduce its 3,000-person workforce by one-third by 2030 in part because of the acceleration of AI.

Around 40 per cent of employers expect to follow Siemiatkowski's lead in culling staff down the line as a result of AI.

Meanwhile, a recent Yale Budget Lab research found no significant differences in the rate of change of occupations' mix or length of unemployment for individuals with jobs with high exposure to AI from the release of ChatGPT through November 2025.

Martha Gimbel, Yale Budget Lab's cofounder attributed AI washing to companies passing off their diminished margins and revenue from a failure to effectively navigate cautious consumers and the current geopolitical tensions to AI. *—Agencies*

ALTMAN SAYS FRIENDSHIP WITH MUSK UNLIKELY

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

A friendship between Silicon Valley tech rivals Sam Altman and Elon Musk is "less likely", the OpenAI CEO has said.

Sam Altman was asked which scenario was more improbable: Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) losing its dominance over global chip manufacturing or he and the Tesla CEO rekindling their friendship.

The comment comes amid an escalating legal battle between the two tech leaders. Musk, who co-founded OpenAI in 2015 before parting ways with the organization. Musk said that Altman and OpenAI abandoned plan to develop AI for humanity and good of all— *PTI.*

Super 8: Tilak and Surya face their first real test vs SA

Abhishek Sharma is literally out of runs with three ducks

AHMEDABAD, 21 FEB

Skipper Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma's rejigged philosophy of dropping anchor rather than going for big strokes will be tested by a quality South African side that seems ready to find chinks in the Indian armour during their opening Super Eight match of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

The Proteas team boasts of a formidable bowling line-up comprising Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj and Aiden Markram and the defending champions will be mindful of the challenge.

The two teams would be playing for the sixth time in the last two months, and it remains to be seen for which side the familiarity works better on Sunday night.

India have not exactly been asked probing questions at the group league stage, but the home favourites are well aware that their batting has left a lot to be desired. Save for opener Ishan Kishan (two fifties and a strike rate of 202), the other three batters in the top four haven't exactly set the stage on fire till now.

Abhishek Sharma is literally out of runs with three ducks, and as much as Suryakumar and Tilak justify playing an anchor role, the Mumbai Indians colleagues have looked far from smooth on tracks where the ball is gripping.

Tilak Varma and Skipper Suryakumar Yadav @ training session –PTI

India's run-scoring has needed brute power that Hardik Pandya (Strike Rate of 155) and Shivam Dube (Strike Rate of 178) are providing at the back-end.

With Abhishek falling to off-spinners twice in a row, it will be interesting to see whether skipper Markram decides to bowl off-breaks in the Powerplay. While Abhishek's form remains a concern, Tilak's scratchy batting throughout the first leg cannot be brushed under the carpet. Match Starts: 7 pm.

Rain washes out Super Eights match between New Zealand and Pakistan

New Zealand and Pakistan shared a point after incessant rain forced the abandonment of the opening T20 World Cup Group 2 Super Eights match here on Saturday.

Amid a slight drizzle, Pakistan won the toss and elected to bat first. But the steady droplets soon transformed into relentless pouring, forcing the officials to call off the match without a ball being bowled.

Before the skies opened up, Pakistan made one change to their eleven, bringing in Fakhar Zaman in place of Khawaja Nafay. But all those calculations and combinations will have to wait for another day, as Pakistan will now face England here on 24 February. —*PTI*

B'desh assistant coach slams Nazrul for fiasco

Bangladesh assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, on Saturday, has hit out at former sports adviser Asif Nazrul, alleging that he misrepresented facts and shifted his position regarding the national team's participation in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

Salahuddin added that it was extremely difficult for the players to come to terms with their exclusion from the tournament, claiming that two members of the squad were left mentally shattered.

Nazrul, who served under Bangladesh's former interim leader Muhammad Yunus, had initially maintained that the decision not to travel to India due to security concerns was taken by the government.

Battle of spin: England take on Lanka in Super Eight

PALLEKELE, 21 FEB

A battle for spin-bowling supremacy is on the cards as England look to draw inspiration from their recent series whitewash of Sri Lanka when the two sides clash in a Super Eight match of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

England had beaten Sri Lanka 3-0 in their T20I series here earlier this month, and they would be happy to return to the island nation for the Super Eight match, having played all their group games in India.

The two-time champions are, however, yet to convince at this T20 World Cup, with three nervy victories against associate nations and a loss at the hands of former champions West Indies.

Co-hosts Sri Lanka began with wins over Ireland and Oman, and were at their best against Australia, whom they beat by eight wickets while chasing 182 here.

The Lankans, however, lost their momentum, losing to giant-killers Zimbabwe in their last group match in Colombo on Thursday.

It will be a fresh start for both sides, with Sri Lanka looking to cash in on the home advantage while England would be looking to pick up steam in the tournament at a place where they had done well less than a month back.

For Sri Lanka, Pathum Nissanka would be looking to continue his top form at the venue where he had hit 100 not out in the win against Australia.

He is among the three centurions in this T20 World Cup and is in second place among the highest run-getters so far.

Kusal Mendis has also been in good touch with three half-centuries in four matches, and he would be one of the key Sri Lankan batters the England bowlers would want to target. England batters, meanwhile, have been struggling so far, with Jacob Bethell the best among them with 143 runs from four matches, with one half-century.

The form of captain Harry Brook and senior player Jos Buttler will be crucial for England's success. The match starts at 3 pm. —*PTI*

We underestimated a few sides: Brook

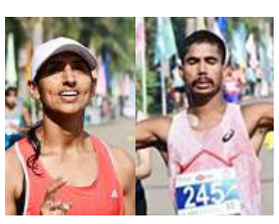
England captain Harry Brook on Saturday admitted underestimating some teams in their group and promised to dish out stronger performances in the Super 8 stage in the T20 World Cup. England, the two-time champions of the tournament, have been far from convincing thus far with three nervy victories against associate nations and a loss at the hands of former champions West Indies. They nearly lost to lowly Nepal before scraping to a four-run win, suffered a comprehensive 30-run defeat to former champions West Indies, and beat Scotland and Italy to reach the Super 8s. They face co-hosts Sri Lanka in their first Super 8s match here on Sunday. "It was obviously a niggly start to the competition.

–PTI

Klaebo becomes 1st athlete to win 6 golds

TESERO, 21 FEB

Norway's Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo completed his historic gold medal sweep of the men's cross-country skiing events on Saturday by winning his sixth race and set the record for the most golds by one athlete in a single Winter Olympics.Klaebo's victory in the 50-kilometer mass start race shattered the nearly 50-year record set by American speed skater Eric Heiden, who won five golds in the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics.All of Heiden's wins were in individual races, and two of Klaebo's have come in team events, so Heiden's record for individual wins still stands.Klaebo's teammates, Martin Loewstroem Nyenget, took silver, and Emil Iversen won bronze in a Norwegian sweep.—*PTI*



–PTI

Baboo and Manju walk away with full marathon titles

CHANDIGARH, 21 FEB

Uttar Pradesh's international athlete Ram Baboo and Punjab's Manju claimed gold medals in the newly-introduced men's and women's full marathon walk events, respectively, at the Indian Open Race Walk Competition held on Saturday.The 26-year-old Baboo clocked three hours, nine minutes, and 17 seconds to win the gold medal in the gruelling 42-km full marathon walk event introduced by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI).On his way to gold in his season's first event, the Asian Games bronze medallist in the 35km mixed walk team event, edged past his more fancied rival Sandeep Kumar of Haryana at the course just beside the picturesque Sukhna Lake.—*PTI*

CLINCH HISTORIC T20I SERIES

India Women beat Aus by 17 runs

ADELAIDE, 21 FEB

–PTI

An entertaining century partnership between Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues powered India to a 17-run win over Australia in the third and final Women's T20I here on Saturday, sealing their first bilateral T20I series triumph against the formidable rivals in a decade.

Mandhana smashed 82 off 55 balls (8x4, 3x6), while Jemimah Rodrigues struck 59 off 46 deliveries as the two senior batters stitched a commanding 121-run stand to propel India to 176 for six after electing to bat.

India's bowlers then seized control as young spinner Shreyanka Patil (3/22) and pace spearhead Renuka Singh (1/29) ripped through the top order to leave Australia reeling at 32 for 3.

The early strikes set the tone for a dominant display as India eventually restricted the hosts to 159 for 9 to seal a memorable T20I series 2-1, registering their first T20I series win in Australia since 2016.

Young left-arm spinner Shree Charani (3/32) underlined her credentials, claiming three crucial wickets to play a pivotal role in cementing India's historic victory.

After electing to bat, India endured a slightly tricky start as Shafali Verma (7) departed early. Mandhana and World Cup hero Rodrigues then took charge of the innings. The duo cut loose in the sixth over, bowled by left-arm spinner Sophie Molineux, collecting three boundaries in a 14-run burst that firmly put India back on track. At the end of the Powerplay, India were 54 for 1.

Both Mandhana and Jemimah kept the scoreboard ticking, with the former in a particularly punishing mood. She took on leg-spinner Georgia Wareham in the ninth over Wareham's first executing a powerful sweep that bisected deep square leg and deep midwicket to perfection. —*PTI*

QATAR OPEN: ALCARAZ BEATS DEFENDING CHAMPION RUBLEV TO STORM INTO FINAL

DUBAI, 21 FEB

World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz continued his unbeaten run in 2026 as he beat defending champion Andrey Rublev 7-6(3), 6-4 on Friday to reach the Qatar Open final, reaching the 12th summit clash in his last 13 tournaments. Russian Rublev fought back from 0-3 down to level the second set and then saved five match points, but the Spaniard ultimately prevailed to win his 11th straight match of the season.

I know what I'm able to do every time that I step on court.

For me, it's great. Obviously, the way I'm approaching every match, I'm just really proud about it, said 22-year-old Alcaraz, who has been a finalist at the last four Grand Slams, winning three of them.I'm trying to be better at that... It's paying off. All the focus and attention. I'm just happy and proud of myself with how I'm getting better and getting mature, I guess.

A struggling Rublev made 14 unforced backhand errors in the first set, but outwitted Alcaraz with precise forehands that nicked the baseline as both players broke the other twice each to go into a tiebreak.

Alcaraz held his nerve to go 6-3 up in the tiebreak as a frustrated Rublev repeatedly smashed the racket on his left knee, breaking a string. —*PTI*

–PTI

Ezzejjari inspires East Bengal to 4-1 win

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

Youssef Ezzejjari struck twice as East Bengal came back from a goal behind to beat Sporting Club Delhi 4-1 in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Salt Lake Stadium on Saturday.

Augustine Lolrochana gave the visitors a shock lead in the fourth minute before Edmund Lalrindika equalised three minutes later.

Spaniard Ezzejjari then put the home side in front from the spot in the 12th minute and added a second five minutes before the end of the half.

Ezzejjari continued his fine start to the campaign, adding to his twin goals from the opening day victory over NorthEast United FC earlier this week.

Brazilian midfielder Miguel Figueira struck from outside the box to add a fourth goal deep into the second half stoppage time.

East Bengal moved to the top of the standings with two wins from two outings to go above FC Goa. —*PTI*

Adani Group working to restart F1 in Greater Noida: Karan Adani

NEW DELHI, 21 FEB

The Adani Group is working on strategies to restart the Formula 1 motor sport at the Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida, Karan Adani, the MD of Adani Cement, said on Saturday.

According to official sources, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya recently visited the circuit and held talks with officials from Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority.

"I'm very excited... obviously the Buddh circuit comes (as) part of the deal. I'm very personally engaged in terms of bringing Formula 1 back into India. I think India has a lot of potential. There's a lot of following in Formula 1 from India, " Adani, who is also the MD of Adani Ports & SEZ, said while speaking at the 70th Foundation Day of All India Management Association (AIMA) in the national capital. The Adani Group is in the fray to buy the troubled Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) -- the flagship company of the Jaypee Group.

In November 2025, the infrastructure-to-energy group won the majority of lenders' votes for the takeover of debt-laden Jaiprakash Associates, as its Rs 14,535-crore acquisition proposal included a higher upfront payment than rival bidders. —*PTI*

–PTI

LPGA THAILAND TOURNAMENT

Jeeno takes 3rd-round lead at her home

CHONBURI, 21 FEB

World No. 1 Jeeno Thitikul birdied her final three holes Saturday for a 6-under 66 and a two-stroke lead going into the final round of her home LPGA Thailand tournament.

Thitikul made a 15-foot birdie putt on the par-3 16th to break away from a four-way tie for the lead, then saw her eagle chip just slide past the hole on 18 before tapping in for a birdie.

Thitikul had a 54-hole total of 20-under 196 at the Siam Country Club Old Course.

"I try to keep everything on track," said the seven-time LPGA Tour winner. "The driver has been really good the past few days, and that's given me confidence. My irons have been better than I expected, and I've been rolling the putts well these past three days."

In second place was Hyo Joo Kim after a 65. Allisen Corpuz (67), second-round leader Somi Lee (72), and Chizzy Iwai (68) were tied for third, three strokes behind Thitikul.

"I'm in a position where I have to chase, but that allows me to be more aggressive," Kim said. "I made a few mistakes today, so tomorrow I just want to attack and hopefully finish first."

Lydia Ko shot 69 and was in sixth place, four strokes behind.

The tournament, about 125 kilometers (75 miles) east of Bangkok, is the first of three events in Asia in consecutive weeks, to be followed by those in Singapore and China in the so-called early Asian swing on the LPGA Tour. Trailing by three strokes to start the third round, Thitikul was helped by Lee's three bogeys in four holes on the front nine.

On the par-5 first hole, both Thitikul, who celebrated her 23rd birthday on Friday, and Lee had eagle putts, but Lee three-putted for par, and Thitikul birdied to close the gap to two strokes. After another birdie on the second, Thitikul moved into a tie for the lead on the sixth hole, then took the outright lead when Lee bogeyed the eighth hole. —*PTI*

Spain beats India 2-0 in FIH Men's Pro League clash

MADRID, 21 FEB

The Indian Men's Hockey Team suffered a 0–2 defeat against Spain on Saturday in an FIH Pro League encounter, with Spain capitalising on key moments while India failed to convert sustained pressure into goals. Strikes from Ignacio Abajo (6') and Ignacio Cobos (36'), one in each half, proved decisive.

India started brightly, moving the ball with pace and purpose. However, Spain's counter-attacking threat paid dividends early when Abajo deflected home in the sixth minute to hand his side the lead. India remained composed, circulating possession through midfield and probing the Spanish defence. Abhishek

nearly equalised late in the first quarter, only to be denied by an excellent save from goalkeeper Luis Calzado.

The second quarter saw end-to-end action. Spain earned a Penalty Corner (PC) in the 24th minute, but Suraj Karkera produced a sharp save to keep India within touching distance. Both sides created half-chances, yet the scoreline remained unchanged at the break with Spain holding a slender 1–0 advantage. —*PTI*